



Country profile: Denmark

A report for the cross-European programme *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*



Children in Scotland
every child - every childhood



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Introduction

The programme

Working for Inclusion is examining how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children is helping to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion.

Taking place from February 2009 - January 2011, the programme encourages and facilitates discussion and debate over the role of the early years workforce. It will enable greater, more extensive and effective dialogue between local and national governments, education and qualification providers, employers, practitioners and policymakers.

Programme partners

The programme is led by Children in Scotland in partnership with:

La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy
Nordland Research Institute, Norway
Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland

Research

The programme encompasses research, which offers a clear picture of early years services and their workforce across the EU and how these relate to levels of poverty and social inclusion. In addition, country profiles of Scotland and the UK, Poland, Norway, Italy, Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary have been produced. This data will contribute towards policy development at EU level as well as Scotland and the rest of the UK. The research is led by Professor Peter Moss and Dr John Bennett.

Study visits

Study visits in the four partner countries will address four key themes relating to poverty and social inclusion and the early years workforce. These visits will form the basis of a report on each theme, published by Children in Scotland on the project website (www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi), and publicised throughout member states at local and national levels.

Each partner country will provide the context for exploring particular key challenges within the early years workforce:

- Working with the child as an active agent in their own learning (Italy)
- Working with diversity, in particular ethnicity, language, disability and gender (Scotland)
- Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas (Norway)
- Exploring the role of the pedagogue in working in an inclusive way with children and families, across agencies and age groups (Poland).

Contents

Glossary of key terms	5
The social context of early childhood	6
Government	6
Demographic, social and economic contexts	7
Tax receipts, social expenditure and child poverty	8
Leave policies	8
Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing	9
Historical overview (history of early childhood services in Denmark)	10
Key concepts and important influences in ECEC	12
The structure of ECEC in Denmark	13
The governance of early childhood services	14
System financing	14
Data collection, monitoring and research	15
Access levels and strategies	17
Overall access levels	17
Access levels for different age groups	17
Children with special needs and rights	18
Conditions for quality improvement and assurance	20
The workforce	20
Other conditions	22
Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school	25
Out-of-school services	26
Current issues and developments	27

Glossary of key terms

Main services

Kommunal dagpleje (local authority childminding) or family day care catering for children from 26 weeks to three years. Family day carers are allowed to take four to five children into their homes.

Vuggestuer (“cradle room”) or day nurseries (up to the age of three). Again, children are allowed to enter from the age of 26 weeks.

Børnehaver (children’s garden) or kindergarten. Children enter the kindergarten from the age of three years (often from a family day care centre) and remain until six years, the new age for obligatory schooling.

Aldersintegrerede institutioner (age-integrated institutions) or integrated institutions which cater for children aged from three months to six years and sometimes even to 12 years. *Fritidshjem* (free time home) or after-school care.

Skolefritidsordninger (school free time facilities) or after-school care being attached to a school, popularly known as SFOs.

Main occupations

Dagplejer (childminder) or family daycarer, working in her own home.

Pædagog (pedagogue), pedagogue working in *Vuggestuer*, *Børnehaver* and *Aldersintegrerede institutioner*.

Pædagogmedhjælper (pedagogue assistant) working in *Vuggestuer*, *Børnehaver* and *Aldersintegrerede institutioner*.

Pædagog (pedagogue) or free-time pedagogue, working in after-school facilities.

The social context of early childhood

At a glance (all figures from EU sources)

Population: 5.5 million. Population density: 126.2 Total fertility rate: 1.85 Children in lone parent households: 17% (EU25 average 13%).

Employment rates (2008): Men 81%; Women 73.2%. 36% of women and 14% of men were in part-time employment, 2007 (EU average: 31% and 8%).

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Purchasing Power Parities (compared to EU average =1): 1.20; Children 'at risk of poverty' 10% (EU average 19%);¹ Gini coefficient: 0.25 (EU average = 0.30); S80/S20, that is, the income of top 20% compared to bottom 20%: 3.4 (EU average 4.8)² Gender Gap Index: 7th (2008)

Tax receipts: 49.4% GDP (EU average: 40.5%); Public expenditure on education: 6.83% of GDP (EU average 4.72%); Public expenditure on social protection: 30.1% GDP (EU average is 27.2%);

Period of leave after birth: 12 months, of which 11 are paid at two-thirds or more of previous earnings.

Government

Denmark is a democratic constitutional monarchy and has been a member of the European Union since 1973. It covers a land area of 43,094 km² with a population of almost 5.5 million people. Since January 1 2007 Denmark has been divided into five regions and 98 municipalities. The regions and municipalities are both led by councils elected every four years, but only the municipal councils have the power to levy taxes. Regional councils are responsible for health services and regional development, while the municipal councils are responsible for day care, elementary schools, care for the elderly, culture, environment and roads. The Faroe Islands and Greenland enjoy home rule, with the Danish Government represented locally by high commissioners. These home rule governments are responsible for most domestic affairs, with foreign relations, monetary affairs, and defence falling to the

Danish Government.

The 1953 constitution established a unicameral parliament or *Folketing* of not more than 179 members, of whom two are elected from the Faroe Islands and two from Greenland. Elections are held at least every four years, but the prime minister can dissolve the *Folketing* at any time and call for new elections. *Folketing* members are elected through proportional representation; any party receiving at least 2% of the total national vote receives representation. The result is a multiplicity of parties; eight parties were represented in the *Folketing* after the November 2007 general election, none of which holds a majority. Participation in national elections is normally around 80-85%.

Politically, the Social Democratic Party held power either alone or in coalition for most of the post-war period except some short periods in the 1950s and 1970s and from 1982 to

The social context of early childhood

1993. From 1993 until 2001, the Social Democratic Party again held power. With immigration high on the November 2001 election campaign agenda, the Danish People's Party doubled its number of parliamentary seats. This was a key factor in bringing into power a new minority right-of-centre coalition government led by Liberal Party chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Parliamentary elections held in November 2007 returned the coalition to government for a third term of up to four years. The coalition consists of the Liberal Party ("Venstre") and the Konservative Party, holding 64 of the 179 seats in the Folketing, and has the parliamentary support of the Danish People's Party, holding another 25 seats. Among the key issues on the current domestic political agenda are addressing the costs and benefits of Denmark's comprehensive social welfare system, restraining taxes, and immigration.

Danes are generally proud of their social welfare system, which ensures that all Danes receive basic health care and social protection. However, according to some sources, the number of working-age Danes living mostly on government transfer payments amounts to more than 644,000 – roughly 23% of the working-age population. This heavy load on public finances burdens other parts of the welfare system: health care (other than for acute problems) and care for the elderly and young children have particularly suffered. More than one-fourth of the labour force is employed in the public sector.

Denmark's standard of living is among the highest in the world, and the Danes devote about 0.8% of gross national income (GNI) to foreign aid to less developed countries, including for peace and stability purposes, refugee pre-asylum costs, and for environmental purposes in central and eastern Europe. This contribution makes Denmark one of the five countries that contribute more than

the UN goal of 0.7% of GDP to development aid.

Demographic, social and economic contexts

The Danish population is 5.5 million people, living in an area of 43,094 km². The 2007 fertility rate was 1.85 and the population density was 126.2 persons per square kilometre. The population is homogenous, composed largely of Danish stock with the addition of immigrant groups and refugees since the 1960s. This relatively small immigrant population is composed mainly of Turks, Pakistanis, Arabs, Kurds and Somalis, Iranians and people from former Yugoslavia. Other, less distinguishable groups of immigrants include mainly Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders, Finns, Germans, Dutch, Poles and Britons. Many Faroese and Greenlanders also live in Denmark proper, but are rarely taken as separate ethnic groups. About two million people live in Copenhagen and its region, which forms part of the progressive Øresund Region (3.5 million inhabitants) that unites Copenhagen with Malmö in Sweden.

Danish censuses do not register ethnicity, language and religion (other than membership of the official Evangelical Lutheran church) and thus, official numbers do not exist about these issues. There is, however, statistical information based on citizenship and country of birth. A small German-speaking minority lives in southern Jutland; a mostly Inuit population inhabits Greenland; and the Faroe Islands have a historic Nordic population with its own unique culture. Danish is the official language of Denmark, but Faroese (in the Faeroe Islands), Greenlandic (an Inuit dialect used in Greenland), and German and Low Saxon (in southern Jutland) are also official languages.

The social context of early childhood

Employment of women

The overall employment rates in 2007 for men and women in Denmark are 81% male employment and 73.2% female, compared to the EU average of 71.7% and 58.3% respectively. The majority of women are employed full-time, but 36% work part-time, compared to 14% of men (EU average: 31% and 8%). The employment rate for women with a child under three is 71.1% and with a child from three to six years 77.8% (EU averages are 57% and 67%). According to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) sources, lone mother employment in 2007 was 82%. The breakdown according to number of children and into full-time and part-time is not available, but it is clear that the ready supply of child care services facilitates lone mothers to work.

Tax receipts, social expenditure and child poverty

Denmark has a GDP per capita of 120% of the EU average (\$32,400). In terms of income inequality it does much better than most European countries, with a Gini coefficient of 0.25 (EU average = 0.30) and an *S80/S20* ratio (that is, the income of the top 20% compared to the bottom 20%) of 3.4 (EU average 4.8).³ It spends more on education (6.83% of GDP) and more on social expenditure (30.1% of GDP), compared to the EU averages of 4.7% and 27.2% respectively. Tax receipts account for 49.4% of GDP compared to the EU average of 40.5%.

Child and family poverty

Child and family poverty are low in Denmark. Social analyses from across the world agree that children in workless families, sole parent families, and large families are most likely (but not necessarily) to be poor. 17% of

Danish children live in lone parent families, compared to the EU average of 13%, but after fiscal transfers and social and labour market supports, only 10% of children live in poverty compared to the EU average of 17.2%. Expenditure on families with children is relatively high at 3.2% of GDP and less than the OECD average of 2.3%. Generally there exists an entitlement for parents to services for their children but local authorities can give priority to services to single mothers and to families in need.

Leave policies

The total length of leave associated with the birth of a child is about a year, most of which is remunerated at full replacement of the beneficiary's wage, up to a ceiling. Many employers also allow a full replacement salary (without ceiling) to employees taking parental leave. Leave is divided between maternity leave (18 weeks), paternity leave (two weeks, to be taken during the first 14 weeks after birth) and parental leave (32 weeks). The parental leave for caring and nursing the child lasts until the child is 48 weeks old, and can be taken by either the mother or the father.

As part of labour market negotiations in 2008, a new parental leave model was introduced for employees working in the state sector. If both parents work in the state sector they now have a right to leave with full payment for 6+6+6 weeks after maternity leave, in all 14 weeks of maternity leave and 18 weeks of parental leave, both with full payment, a total of 32 weeks. Six weeks are earmarked for the mother, six weeks for the father and six weeks can be shared. The six weeks for the father replace his former two weeks of paternity leave, which is now increased to six weeks with full pay. In a survey on parents of children born in 2005, 55% of fathers reported that they received full wages during their whole time on parental leave, compared with

The social context of early childhood

9% of mothers. This difference is due to mothers taking longer leave periods, going beyond the weeks where they might be entitled to full earnings for a large part of their leave period. In the extended periods, they receive only basic benefit payments (Olsen, 2008).

Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing

Rural families in particular still prefer to place their children for the first years in family day care because they think the home environment provides a safer and more manageable setting than a day nursery. When their child reaches the age of three, the same families have no hesitation in preferring a kindergarten. Urban families generally prefer age-integrated institutions, because these provide continuity for the child.

Nowadays, access to a child care facility is seen as a right for the child (almost like the right to go to school) and greater focus is put on the quality of these facilities. One of the major fields of debate is the aim and content of child care facilities, in particular: how to balance between the traditional pedagogy of play, creativity and social competence and the contemporary focus on preparation for school through more academic activities.

The former discussion about who has primary responsibility for the child - the family or society - has changed into the consensus that it is a matter of joint responsibility. A debate still to be resolved is the financing of the facilities - does the entitlement to facilities mean that they should be free of charge like the school?

Historical overview (history of early childhood services in Denmark)

The first pre-school establishments were created in the 1820s as private initiatives with a view to receiving the children of working families, where both parents worked outside the home. During the period 1850 to 1900, private institutions appeared which were open on a part-time basis. These institutions had pedagogical objectives and were aimed at the children of the more privileged classes. Thus, child care developed in two different directions - one type of facility aiming to look after children and the other favouring a more developmental approach with respect to play and the activities of the child, inspired by the ideas of Friedrich Fröbel. The two systems merged during the 1920s into a single service: the kindergarten institution, accommodating children from different social groups.

From 1919, the State allocated a subsidy to institutions with a social vocation. The Social Reform Act of 1933 made it possible for these institutions to receive up to 50% of their operational expenditure from the State. From that time, the State and the municipalities have gradually taken charge of financial and pedagogical responsibility for early childhood institutions. In 1949, a subsidy was also made available for those institutions which had until then not been entitled to it as they did not meet the conditions of the act, which required them to cater for the children of disadvantaged families. The pedagogical objective of the institutions was thus recognised.

An act of 1964 placed a legal obligation on municipalities to make available all public services to all citizens. The right to early childhood education and care was also emphasized in the Social Assistance Act of 1976, which required that the municipalities allocate the necessary resources to create the necessary structures to meet the needs of the families. In 1987, the State delegated responsibility for the total financial

administration of the pre-school institutions to the municipalities.

In 2007, a new day care facilities act (*Dagtilbudsloven*) came into force, updating the responsibilities of the municipalities and the goals of the day care system. The *Dagtilbudsloven* law lays down that:

- Each municipality should formulate targets and a framework for the day care programmes proposed, as these programmes are an integral part both of the municipality's global offer for children and of the preventive and supportive effort vis-à-vis children. This should include children with reduced physical or mental functional abilities or with other support needs.
- The day care suppliers are - in cooperation with the parents - to provide care to children and support the individual child's acquisition and development of social and general skills with a view to strengthening the individual child's all-round development and self-esteem and contribute to giving children a good and secure childhood and adolescence.
- The day care offers are to provide opportunities for experiences and activities which contribute to stimulating the imagination, creativity and linguistic development of the child as well as giving the child room to play and learn and room for physical development, interaction and the possibility of exploring the surroundings.
- The day care offers are to provide children with a possibility of participation in decision-making and of joint responsibility and thus contribute to developing children's independence and

Historical overview (history of early childhood services in Denmark)

skills to participate in engaging communities.

- The day care offers are to give children an understanding of cultural values and of interaction with nature.
- The day care shall promote the children's understanding of democracy and develop their integration into Danish society.

Key concepts and important influences in ECEC

1. The long tradition of respect for childhood and preserving 'a time for childhood'. This historical thread reaches back to the strong 19th century Danish people's education movement and in early childhood includes the influence of Fröbel.

2. A strong "progressive" culture or philosophy of childhood influenced by pedagogical ideas from the English Summerhill school, the German "vom Kinde aus" and the Swedish writer Ellen Key on *The century of the child*.

3. An emphasis on the child-child relationship and on the child-adult pedagogical relationship.

4. The right of children to be consulted, to express their opinions and participate. The Danish child is not considered incompetent, and child care is not seen merely as 'looking after' children. Rather, the aim of the child care centre and kindergarten is to create settings that will foster the children's development, wellbeing and independence.

5. Respect for and knowledge of the environment – pedagogical focus of the Danish kindergarten on earth, air, fire and water. Thus, the emphasis on being outdoors, leading to developments such as "forest kindergartens".

6. In the latter years, influences both from the formal educational system (learning, didactics) but also from Reggio Emilia and the "100 languages of children".

The structure of ECEC in Denmark

Service organisation and provision

With a participation rate of 66% in full-day services, Denmark has the highest rate in Europe of nursery enrolment for children aged zero to three. This figure is even more remarkable when looking at the figures for one and two year old children: 88% one year old and 92% two year old. Enrolment rates for children aged three to six are likewise extremely high, reaching 97% of children. Children have a right to services and municipalities are required to provide access to nurseries or other day care services following a reasonable delay from the first demand by parents. A reasonable delay is generally considered to be not more than three months, but normally parents are able to have a place at the end of parental leave, if they have requested a place within the deadline for applications set by the municipality. Some municipalities have set up a day care guarantee which states that the parents are entitled to be offered day care for their child when the child is one. Parents are free to choose which day care service they wish for their child, but if the parents choose a specific institution, the municipality is not obliged to comply with the one-year guarantee. The general purpose of early childhood services is to create - in cooperation with the parents - a setting that favours the development, wellbeing and independence of children. Settings should ensure a normal day for children which at the same time gives them security and challenges, and in which close links with trained adults can develop.

Main types of service

There are five different types of day care facilities (*dagtilbud*) for young children in Denmark, generally defined by the ages of children attending:

- *Kommunal dagpleje* (local authority

childminding) or family day care, catering for children from 26 weeks to three years. Family day carers are allowed to take four to five children into their homes.

- *Vuggestuer* (cradle room) or day nurseries (up to the age of three). Children are allowed to enter from the age of 26 weeks.
- *Børnehaver* (children garden) or kindergartens. Children enter the kindergarten from the age of three (often from a family day care) and remain until they are six, the new age for obligatory schooling.
- *Aldersintegrerede institutioner* (age-integrated institutions) or integrated institutions which cater for children aged from three months to 12 years.
- *Fritidshjem* (free time home) or after-school care for children from six to ten and sometimes even 12 or 14.
- *Skolefritidsordninger* (school free time facilities) or after-school care being attached to a school, popularly known as SFOs.

Currently, the majority of day care institutions are integrated which means that they cater for children from 26 weeks to six years. They consist of two sections: a nursery and a kindergarten. Sometimes a *fritidshjem* or after school care facility (SFO) is attached. At the moment, 86% of six to nine-year-olds attend an SFO after school, attached to schools. Usually the centre-based institutions divide the children into groups of 11-12 for children aged zero to three and 20-22 for three to six-year-olds. Each group has its own name and room, and a team of two or three pedagogues and assistants is in charge.

The structure of ECEC in Denmark

Providers

Two thirds of the day care institutions are municipal day care services, and one third are independent and run by associations and/or parents who have entered into agreement with the local authority. Where financing and the organisation of services are concerned, municipal and independent institutions function according to the same principles. In the non-municipal services, it is usual for a board of parents to be responsible for the administration of the institution and to make decisions regarding the use of the public subsidy and the appointment of a head and staff. It is also possible to run private institutions but only a very few actually exist. Mostly private institutions have been established by parents as a reaction to municipalities closing down small public kindergartens.

Each municipality has overall responsibility for providing childcare facilities for children, to ensure a sufficient supply of places and to take all necessary initiatives in relation to children in need of additional support. Within this arrangement, parents are free to decide the kind of childcare they want to use. Because of cost and proximity, but also because of a shortage of day nurseries, most Danish parents opt for family day care until children reach the age of three. As access figures show (see below), family day care is the most popular parental choice for services for their children under the age of three. In Denmark, these services are more rigorously managed than in most other countries: the family daycarers are selected and trained by the municipality, enter into a contractual relationship with it and are paid and supervised directly by the municipal pedagogical advisers.

The governance of early childhood services

After a brief interlude with the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs, early childhood services have been placed again, since 2007, under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs. The Ministry has responsibility for policy in the field, and for overseeing admission criteria; the quality of the services provided, and the implementation of quality regulations and measures; parental involvement; funding and financing, etc. A major aim is to support, in collaboration with parents, the development of young children and provide secure and developmental learning environments for young children while their parents are at work. The Ministry is not in charge of salary and working conditions. These matters are treated through negotiations between BUPL (the union of pedagogues) and FOA (the union for childminders and assistants) with the employers' organisation, Local Government Denmark.

The daily administration and management of early childhood services remains the prerogative of each local authority, eg to fund and establish services to meet parental demand; to supervise the quality and educational content of local services; and to provide adequate staffing and sufficient support to staff. Within the Act on Day care Facilities, each day care facility must develop a pedagogical curriculum, approved by the local authority. From August 2009, the SFOs have also to describe the aims and contents of their work.

System financing

Family day care, nurseries, kindergartens, and out-of-school services are all subsidised or delivered directly by the local authorities from block grants allocated by the state. The

The structure of ECEC in Denmark

subsidy is fixed on the basis of the budgets of the day care facilities for the coming year and may only be fixed for one financial year at a time. Public investment is high, owing to high demand, low child:staff ratios and relatively higher salaries for pedagogues than in other countries. Total expenditure on day care and leisure time facilities (ie all Early Childhood Education and Care) is at least 1.35% of GDP compared to 0.6% EU average.⁴ Until 2010, fees are capped for parents at 25% of running costs, with poorer families using services free of charge or at reduced rates. From 2010, the introduction of obligatory meals allows the municipalities to raise the fees to 30%. The gross costs for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Denmark are divided into two groups - one for day care facilities and another for SFOs (leisure-time services). Costs per child in the 2009 budget for day care facilities (mostly zero to six years) were: gross costs per child: €11.000; net costs per child: €5.600. In the SFOs (mostly six to nine years), gross costs per child were €3.850; and net costs: €2.800.

Costs to parents: For children under school age, the parents' payment of a place in a day care facility must not exceed 25% (from 2010, 30%) of gross operating costs for operating the individual day care facility, or of the average gross operating costs for operating similar day care facilities in the local authority. This means that the local council's subsidy must account for at least 75% (from 2010, 70%) of gross operating costs for operating the individual day care facility, or of the average gross operating costs of operating similar day care facilities in the local authority. The subsidies are not paid directly to the parents but to the day care facility to which the child has been admitted and must be used to run the day care facility.

Other forms of financial benefits for children and families (such as child supplements,

compensation for childbirth leave, child benefits, etc) are also generously financed, reaching 3.2% of GDP compared to a 2005 OECD average of 2.3%. (Source: Social Expenditure Database, 2009).

Data collection, monitoring and research

In Denmark, data is collected on a regular and official basis on:

- The supply and distribution of early childhood services across the country;
- Enrolments and profiles of children enrolled (eg age, ethnicity, etc);
- Care arrangements for children aged zero to 12 (ie who cares for them during the day, including out-of-school care);
- The workforce - numbers, qualifications, pay and profile (eg age, gender,);
- Structural standards (eg ratios and group sizes). No national evaluation of early childhood services has been undertaken in the last five years.

Monitoring

Monitoring, evaluation and research are normally the responsibility of the line ministry, the Ministry of Interior and Social Affairs. In pedagogical matters, the Ministry can seek advice and guidance from the Danish Centre of Educational Environment and from the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA). EVA is an independent state institution established under the Ministry of Education in 1999. It is in charge of conducting research into early childhood education and care, primary and secondary schools, and further, higher and adult education. EVA's role in the field of ECEC is to make evaluations and collect and

The structure of ECEC in Denmark

disseminate knowledge, eg about children's development of language skills or about how the local authorities carry out the obligatory task of assessing the language skills of three-year-old children. EVA also investigates quality issues in day centres and published a handbook in 2009 on how to set objectives and evaluate local development projects in ECEC. The methods advocated build on social science and include both quantitative and qualitative approaches. EVA also produces case studies with a focus on good practice.

Research

Compared to Sweden and Norway, Denmark does not produce much research on early childhood policy and services. Most research in the field is done by the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University (offering Master and PhD courses for pedagogues and teachers) and some other universities - especially the University of Copenhagen and

Roskilde University. Research and surveys are also carried out at the Danish Evaluation Institute (*Evalueringsinstituttet*) and at the Danish National Centre for Social Research (*Det nationale forskningscenter for velfærd*). This research tends to be practical in nature and focuses on themes such as how to manage screening activities on language in child care facilities and how to accommodate vulnerable children. The Danish trade union for social pedagogues, BUPL, has established a fund for financing research on the profession of pedagogues (approx one million € every year). There is also a growing interest in research by the Danish authorities in order to have evidence about the outcome of investments in child care facilities. For further examples on research, please consult the English pages of www.sfi.dk and www.dpu.dk and the web pages of Copenhagen and Roskilde Universities.

Access levels and strategies

Overall access levels

At a glance

ECEC for 0-3 children	% in services = 66%
Children to 12 months	83% in domestic care by parents, grandparents, etc.
17% in services	
Children 12-24 months Children 24-36 months	11% at home ; 89% in services 93% in services
ECEC for 3-6 children	Percentage enrolment = 97%
Kindergartens	45%
Integrated institutions	55%

Source: Statistics Denmark (2009)

The law requires that a place should be provided to parent(s) for each child within three months⁵ of demand, but waiting lists exist in very few municipalities. In its 2005 Government programme, the Government suggests earmarking DKK 2bn over the following four-year period for applications aiming to improve the quality of child care. The money should be used to bolster efforts concerning socially disadvantaged children, more employees and facility improvement and promoting the establishment of nature kindergartens. A Danish language stimulation programme has been made available to bilingual children and families in the years prior to compulsory school, and bridging work toward immigrant families is taking place, particularly in the Copenhagen area.

Access levels for different age-groups

The current access figures are as follows:

- *Zero to one year:* 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 forbidden by law and is little used. *Legestuer* – the playrooms and facilities shared by all municipal childminders (family day carers) operate within the municipal childminder arrangements. Parents may also take their children to *Legesteder* to play with other children. In 2008, 17% of infants were enrolled, of whom 11%

Access levels and strategies

were in family day care and 6% in centre-based day care (crèche or age-integrated centres).

- *One to three years:* 66% of children are enrolled in day care facilities in this period (the highest rate in Europe). Family day care (49%) is most widely used in rural areas, while age-integrated facilities and day nurseries (51%) are the most common day care facilities elsewhere.
- *Three to six years:* 97% of three to six-year-old children were enrolled in 2007 - almost exclusively in centre-based day care (age-integrated centres or kindergartens). Furthermore, there are 15-hour programmes for bilingual children who are not attending the day care system.

Admission criteria and procedures.

If the parents want a place immediately after their child reaches 26 weeks and have applied for a place in a day care facility within the deadline for applications, the local council must, in order to observe the guaranteed day care availability, be able to offer a place to the child at least four weeks after the child has reached the age of 26 weeks, regardless of whether this follows immediately after the parent's parental leave. Generally, the local authority will ask the parents to state when they need a place. In these situations, the local authority may set the date when the parents must be given a place as the date when the parents need a place. The guaranteed day care availability is observed as long as the deadline for a place is prolonged at the request of the parents. The guaranteed day care availability does not guarantee a place in a specific day care facility. However, parents are always able to make requests for admission to specific day care facilities in the

local authority.

For some families it may be easier to reconcile family life and working life if their children are admitted to a day care facility in another local authority. This may be because a family lives close to a local authority border and therefore closer to a day care facility in a local authority other than its local authority of residence. The same may apply to families where the parents work in a local authority other than their local authority of residence, meaning that it better harmonises with the family's everyday life for the child to go to a day care facility in the local authority where the parents work. If a local authority has not closed its waiting lists for children from other local authorities, these children will be entered on the waiting list on the same terms as children from the local authority. There may not be any available places precisely where parents would most prefer their children to be admitted; however, requests will be considered based on the same rules that apply to parents living in the local authority.

Children with additional support needs and rights

Children from low-income families

The child poverty level after redistribution policies is 10%, among the lowest in Europe (average 19%) and the lowest in the world (UNICEF, 2005). However, as many as 38% of children at risk live in lone parent families and 36% in families with more than three children. In Denmark, day care services are seen as playing a special role vis-à-vis these children. Family fees are often waived for these children who, in general, are given first call to services. Similarly, the after-school centres are directed to focus on these children who for a short or long period of time may need special attention

Access levels and strategies

from an adult.

Children with additional support needs and rights

Municipalities have overall responsibility for providing childcare 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. The integration of children with physical or mental handicaps in the mainstream education system is a central principle. The aim is to give disabled children or children with particular social difficulties a childhood that is as normal as possible. The children are taken care of more intensely, frequently by attaching additional staff to the institution. Sometimes disabled children are together in a separate group. The number of educators attached to such a group of children with additional support needs is particularly high, and the staff also has the possibility of consulting specialists. It is thought that bringing together in these services mainstream children and children with additional support needs is important for their development. In addition, an effective public network of health and family support services has been established, accessible to all families at community level and with outreach services to families with young children with special needs.

Ethnic and bilingual children

Immigrants form over 4% of the Danish population, and it is estimated that bilingual children will soon constitute more than 10% of enrolments in schools. Since 1 August 2007, all local councils must offer all three year olds a language assessment and follow-up, as required. (Language assessment is an offer for all parents of three year olds, meaning that the parents decide whether their child should undergo a language assessment). The language assessments are to serve as an

extra support tool in the pedagogic work for children's language development. According to the material developed for the former Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs, the language assessment process typically goes as follows:

- A pedagogue whom the child knows well will offer the parents a language assessment.
- If the parents accept the offer, they will be given a parent form to be used in making the first part of the language assessment with the child.
- The parents then return the form to the pedagogue, who will enter the answers in a registration form for the child.
- The pedagogue will then perform the pedagogical part of the language assessment.
- The parents are given the final score, meaning the overall result of the two assessments. If a special effort is called for, an agreement is made between the pedagogue and the parents.

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.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

The workforce

Composition

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 the five Nordic countries. Nursery and pedagogue 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 six months to six years, and make up 25% of staff in out-of-school care.

At a glance

Type of provision	Title of lead staff & assistant (with literal translation)	Pre-service education level required	Qualifications level
<i>Services for children 0-3 years</i> Family day care	Daglejer (daily caretaker) or family day carer	3 weeks	Aptitude and past experience rather than a qualification level
Day nursery	Pædagog (pedagogue) or pedagogue / social educator	At least 3.5 years tertiary B college training	Tertiary degree to professional bachelor in social education
Integrated service	<i>Pædagogmedhjælper</i> (pedagogue assistant)	None but vocational level is offered	Secondary vocational level with a qualification as pedagogical assistant
Integrated service	Same as in day nursery	Same as in day nursery	Tertiary degree in preschool education
<i>Continued on p21</i>			

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Type of provision	Title of lead staff & assistant (with literal translation)	Pre-service education level required	Qualifications level
Services for children 3-6 years Kindergarten	Same as in day nursery	Same as in day nursery	Same as in day nursery
Integrated service	Same as in kindergarten	Same as in kindergarten	Same as in kindergarten
After-school care for children 6-9/12 years	Same as in kindergarten	Same as in kindergarten	Same as in kindergarten

Pre-service training

The minimum qualification for pedagogues is three-and-a-half years at university colleges (International Standard Classification of Education level 5B). There is no minimal qualification for assistants: Aptitude and past experience rather than a qualification level seem to be the basis for recruitment. A small proportion of assistants undertake an adult education or vocational training course for 18 months. 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.

Professional development

Regulations require that contact staff in all licensed early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and participate in regular in-service training. Further studies, such as higher diplomas, Master's degrees or even PhDs, are offered to pedagogues by the School of Education,

Aarhus University. The main obstacle in pursuing further studies is lack of financial support. Studies may be undertaken part-time but this can be difficult because of combining work and study. After five years experience, pedagogue assistants may study to become a professional, bachelor level pedagogue via shorter courses combined with work. Depending on their financial possibilities, day care facilities sometimes run individual centre-based courses for all the staff together.

Work conditions and salaries

Pedagogues and assistants working on a full-time basis work 37 hours a week. Family day carers (childminders) work 48 hours per week. All of these staff are entitled to paid holidays, pay during periods of sickness, and parental and childcare leave.

Workforce recruitment and evidence of shortages

There has been a decline in the numbers of applicants to become a pedagogue in recent years. The situation changed in 2009 because

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

of the financial crisis, which has made many young people aware of the need to have an education. There is also the attraction of the public sector, where job security is better than in the private sector. This is a timely turnabout as the present cohort of pedagogues is aging and many will retire in a few years. Circumstances are different for both pedagogue assistants and family daycarers. Pedagogue assistant positions are popular since this type of work is relatively well paid for unskilled workers and offers responsibility and teamwork with others. Many young people wish to be recruited for a year or so before entering tertiary studies. By contrast, municipalities have increasing problems in recruiting childminders (family day carers) because this rather isolated job is no longer attractive.

Because of the growing number of children of ethnic minorities in ECEC, there is a growing need to recruit multicultural staff. Some university colleges offer special courses to introduce ethnic minorities to pedagogue studies.

Trade unions and other workforce organisations

Almost all pedagogues are members of the National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators (BUPL). Pedagogue assistants are organised by the national trade union FOA - Trade and Labour Organisation. The trade union membership is about 90% for BUPL and somewhat lower for FOA.

Other conditions

Child

staff ratios and group sizes

There is no national regulation concerning child-staff ratios or about the involvement of

qualified staff. In practice, child:staff ratios are much more favourable than in most other countries. Child-staff ratios in 2008 per full-time adult were: crèche (zero to three year olds) 3.3 children per full-time adult; kindergarten (three to six years) 6.5 children; age-integrated facility (zero to nine or to 12 years) 6.5 children; leisure (*fritidshjem*) and free-time facilities (SFOs attached to schools) for six to nine years, respectively 9.4 and 13.5 children; special day care one pedagogue per four children. The number of staff per child is highest for the youngest children and in special day care facilities for children with a physical and/or mental disabilities. A negotiated agreement (through collective bargaining) guarantees that the manager and deputy-manager in child care centres must be qualified pedagogues.

Curricula for children zero to six years

The *Law on Pedagogical Curriculum* came into force on August 1st 2004 and is incorporated into the Act on Day care facilities. It applies to all child care centres as well as to public family day care. Each individual child care service must work out its own pedagogical curriculum, while a common curriculum is worked out among the public family day carers. 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 to predominate, and thus change the Danish view of childhood and the core 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

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

adequacy of funding to educate staff to take care of this new task.

The pedagogical curriculum proposes that all early childhood services should be guided by the following six topics: the holistic personal development of the child; 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 (zero to three years) and a section dealing with the older children (three to six years). In regard to integrated institutions (eg children’s houses) with zero to six-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 established. 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 six topics, intended as an example for the child care centres when they are to work out their own curriculum.

Although the law caused much discussion, pedagogical work in the Danish kindergarten continues according to tradition. Before 2004, centres had to develop so-called ‘activity plans’. These summarized all aspects of the centre’s pedagogical work and the learning processes of the children were an integral part of these plans. Many pedagogues have said: “we have always been involved with children’s learning - we’ve always done that!” The

traditional pedagogical philosophy emphasizes the free and creative development of the child in a social context. Early childhood centres are seen as social pedagogical institutions, adopting a broad and holistic approach, rather than as educational institutions focussed on selected learning. Education in the day care institutions is given in the form of play and other developmental activities. Children learn to listen, concentrate, remember, and retell. They are furthermore trained in social processes and language: to listen to each other and tell stories, in movement and rhythm. The children learn by playing, by observing committed adults and by interacting with them. In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 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 seek to 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 are given the opportunity to acquire knowledge about and experience of the natural environment.

Licensing and inspection

Most of the 98 municipalities organize the responsibility for day care facilities in a single administration together with the primary school and other services for children and young people. As part of their supervisory responsibility, administrations employ pedagogical consultants who work closely with the managers of the day care centres and the schools on quality and the development of services. The local administration arranges in-service training courses and may be invited to solve problems in the centres together with the staff and often in cooperation with the local trade union representative of BUPL.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Because of decentralisation, disparities in access and quality have been noted between different municipalities, a situation which generally does not favour poor neighbourhoods and families.

Attention to children's outcomes

In Denmark, the tradition has been to focus on the excellence of the institution rather than on the learning achievement of each child. Under the rules of the Day Care Facility Act (2006), all day care facilities must prepare a written child environment impact assessment, which must be revised at least every three years and when changes are implemented that may affect the child environment. The child environment impact assessment is a tool used to describe, assess and develop the child environment. The child environment must be assessed from a child's perspective and children's experience of the child environment must be included in the assessment. This means that the adults must try to put themselves in the place of the child and retrieve knowledge directly from the children.

It is up to the individual day care facility to decide how to make the child environment impact assessment, which gives a range of options for creating a working process that fits into the local educational practice and logic of the day care facility. The assessment must consider three mandatory areas of the day care facility:

- The physical child environment

- The aesthetic child environment
- The mental child environment

A comprehensive description of these areas should help focus attention on a good and healthy environment for children in day care facilities throughout Denmark.

The management of the day care facility is responsible for preparing a written child environment impact assessment. Staff and parents must be included in discussions about the child environment impact assessment. Similarly, management is responsible for ensuring that the child environment impact assessment is publicly available to parents and other interested parties at all times. The assessment must be displayed in a central location in the day care facility and be published on the website of the day care facility and/or local authority.

Family and community involvement

An important quality element of a pre-school institution is cooperation with parents. Danish day care operates 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 to be carried out and for the use of funds available through the budgetary framework. The results are often communicated in the form of a comprehensive activity plan. Activity plans are used as a basis for evaluation of the work carried out in the centre. Centre staff are also board members

Relationship and transitions between early childhood services and school

Cooperation and cohesion between the day care system (ie the kindergartens and the age-integrated centres), the school system and free-time institutions were given special attention in the national *Folkeskole 2000* plan. With the help of their pedagogical advisors, some municipalities pushed ahead with plans to make their kindergartens and schools active *centres of learning* which would develop their own learning plans. In addition, the former Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark, created a working group in 1996 to improve quality, and develop new methods for educational work in kindergartens.

In addition, the Act on Day care Facilities (2006) requires both early childhood services and after-school facilities to “ensure a good transition to school”, together with the parents. Locally this is often carried out through close cooperation between pedagogues in charge of the children during their last year before they start at school and the pedagogues in the kindergarten class (six to seven years). Also, the municipalities prepare and decide a comprehensive policy for childhood and adolescence. Today there is a tendency to integrate day care centres and schools under a single administration, management and boards. This can be seen as a serious challenge because of concerns in both the pedagogue and teacher professions about safeguarding their status and autonomy.

Out-of-school services

In Denmark, centres are available to school-age children after school ends, and children and families may take up the offer on a voluntary basis. The local council is charged with ensuring the necessary number of places in after-school facilities. The necessary number of places is assessed in relation to other offers that may cover the need for places, eg school-based free-time facilities

(SFOs) under the Folkeskole Act (on Primary and Secondary Education). After-school centres may be established as local-authority, independent and private after-school centres. The overwhelming service today is the SFOs (93%) whereas the after-school facilities (the free time home) is reduced to only 7%. (2008).

The purpose of the after-school facility is to support the children’s wellbeing, development and learning. After-school facilities must include both educationally planned activities and the children’s own choice of activities. They must also support the children’s continued language development, develop the children’s aesthetic and bodily expression, and support their knowledge of health and nature. Children in after-school facilities must have co-determination and co-responsibility and thus an impact on their own everyday lives. All after-school facilities must be based on democratic values and foster integration into Danish society. Similarly, after-school facilities must inform children about other after-school services in the local authority. After-school facilities must help create a smooth transition between school and the after-school facility and give children the opportunity to do homework.

The local council lays down the guidelines for admission to after-school facilities. The individual local authority should thus be contacted for information about the admission guidelines for after-school facilities in the relevant local authority. When a child is admitted to an after-school facility, the local council grants a subsidy covering the costs of the place. The local council’s subsidy must constitute at least 70% of the budgeted gross operating costs. Parents’ own payment for the place must not exceed 30% of the budgeted gross operating costs. The subsidy and payment rules for after-school centres are similar to those applying to day care facilities

Out-of-school services

in general.

The dominant out-of-school service is the SFO, or the free-time facility attached to the school. This service was introduced during the 1980s to accommodate a fast growing need for more services for children at school. The service of SFO was put into the Folkeskole Act in 1985 as an offer the local authority could establish. Since then many of the former after-school facilities have been changed to become SFOs. The main differences between the two services are that a) the management of the SFO has become the responsibility of the school principal, and b) the parent board of the former after-school facility has been replaced by the school board. SFO fees are not regulated centrally by fixing a percentage of costs that parents should pay (as is the case for early childhood services), but are decided by the local authority. The opportunity is widely used by the local authorities to manage their budgets. The fees are 30% higher in SFOs than in after school facilities (2009).

Until August 2009, the content and aims of the SFOs were not described in the Folkeskole Act. Local authorities are now obliged to set the aims and the contents of the SFOs. They do so mostly by leaving the preparation to the sponsoring school, where the Ministry of Education can determine what issues should be included in these aims and contents. The Ministry has called for special attention to health, sports and homework activities. The inclusion of the out-of-school service in the primary school system has resulted in a growing integration of the teachers' teaching and the pedagogues' pedagogical activities that is producing a better and more cohesive experience for pupils/children in the first grades from kindergarten class up to grade three. This development has highlighted debate on the professional roles and tasks of teachers and pedagogues, and raises some exciting prospects. The challenge is to reconcile teaching, free time activities and play into a learning environment that is characterized by variety and interest for children.

Current issues and developments

Current issues

According to the experts consulted, the following are the main current issues and developments in Denmark.

Globalisation, quality reforms and reduced investment

In 2001, the current government introduced a general tax ceiling in order to end increases in public spending. This initiative was twinned with a reform of quality and different initiatives to prepare Danish society for globalisation. In the early childhood field, the quality reform was welcomed as a sign that the efforts of previous years to provide enough places for children in day care facilities had been achieved. The next step was to raise the quality of services.

In recent years, the major focus has been on curriculum matters, in particular regarding children from vulnerable families, promoting children's health, and reducing obesity by having more sports activities. Due to the tax ceiling, these quality aims have been difficult to meet. For example, a special initiative is the obligatory lunch at day care facilities beginning from January 2010. This was decided by the government with the intention of securing a healthy lunch for all children. However, the public subsidies are not sufficient to provide a lunch that can satisfy the many parents who wish their children to have environmentally sound, locally-sourced food. Many municipalities have to buy the lunch for the children from big central kitchens or private providers because the local authorities cannot afford to establish professional kitchens in each day care facility. Another example of reduced public investment in services is the attempt to form larger units and merge smaller services into larger ones. Thus, former individual special services for children with special needs are now being

integrated into ordinary services like day care facilities.

Globalisation issues and the PISA surveys have together been used by the government to promote closer cooperation between the day care sector and the formal education sector. It is proposed to make the organisation of the day care facilities more effective by merging individual day care facilities into bigger single units and by merging schools and day care facilities under one single management and board. However, to transfer the leadership of day care facilities from professional pedagogue managers to school principals belittles the expertise and autonomy of the early childhood field.

In tune with globalisation, the government also favours "free choice" to childcare for parents through promoting an accreditation process, the documentation of centres and "user information" on the internet regarding different childcare services. Parents are expected to "shop around" for services. This approach is problematic as parents are reduced to being simply users or consumers of public services instead of, as citizens with rights, being involved in improving their local services. At the same time, a really big challenge for early childhood professionals is to manage the ever increasing demands from the central and local authorities to document and evaluate day care services. These administrative tasks reduce the actual time available to work directly with the children and limit the time available for preparing and reflecting on the educational activities.

An example of the growing influence of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys is the introduction of language tests as an offer to parents for their three-year-old children and obligatory language tests when the children start in the kindergarten class in primary school. It should

Current issues and developments

be noted that these tests are in the Danish language - not in the mother tongue of the children. This does not favour immigrant children as the importance of learning the mother tongue well is recognised as being decisive in learning a second language. The view of the pedagogue profession through the activities of BUPL is to promote a larger vision of child welfare that addresses issues that have a fundamental importance for Danish society, for instance, the integration of immigrant children. This raises too the matter of a professional code of ethics and the need for the profession itself to develop knowledge instead of letting others set the agenda.

Current developments

Compulsory education in Denmark now lasts for ten years instead of the previous nine years, a change introduced in August 2009. This means that the former optional one-year of a kindergarten class (six to seven years) will become compulsory. It will become the first form of obligatory primary education but retains its name. As happens in the other classes of the Danish Folkeskole, teaching goals for kindergarten class have been prescribed. Pedagogues will still teach in the kindergarten class.

Notes

¹ The definition of 'children at-risk of poverty' used here follows the EU definition, that is, children living in households with less than **60%** of the national equivalised median household income for a couple with two children.

² *The Gini co-efficient* measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within a country deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. Perfect equality has the value of 0 and perfect inequality the value of 1. The higher the decimal number assigned to a country, the greater the inequality that exists in a country. The EU average is 0.31. *S80/S20* is the ratio of the total income received by the 20% of the population with the highest income compared to the income received by the 20% with the lowest income; the higher the ratio, the greater the income inequality between the rich and poor in a country. The EU average is 4.8.

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⁴ Expenditure levels for the Nordic countries for children aged 3 to 6 six years seem to be greatly underestimated in the OECD *Education at a Glance* figures.

⁵ After parental leave, within four weeks, provided that parents have requested a place within the time framework set by the municipality.

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