

DENMARK

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are **ECEC centre** (*aldersintegrerede institution, 0–5*), **nursery** (*vuggestue, 0–2*) and **kindergarten** (*børnehave, 3–6*)¹. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Denmark

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 1829 | First philanthropic day nursery opens for working-class children, inspired by Robert Owen. |
| 1870 | First part-time Froebel-inspired kindergarten is established. |
| From 1900 | The two strands of provision (care/education) gradually merge into a people's kindergarten (<i>børnehave</i>) along Froebelian lines, mostly for poor children. |
| 1919 | Allocation of first state subsidy to institutions with a social purpose. Childcare for the poor was now seen as a public responsibility. 50% of the costs of establishing kindergartens are subsidised, but two-thirds of the children must be from poor families. |
| 1933 | The legal regulation of childcare was moved from the Ministry of Education to the newly established Ministry of Social Affairs. |
| 1949 | State subsidy extended to include institutions for non-disadvantaged children. |
| From 1951 | Introduction of legal obligation for the municipalities to support universal access to all public services |
| 1964 | The Child and Youth Care Act states that it is a public task to provide universal access for all children. |
| 1987 | Full delegation of financial administration of ECEC provision to the municipalities |
| 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Day Care Facilities Act, updating the responsibilities and the overall goals of the day care system – Responsibility for ECEC shifts from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry for Family and Consumers' Affairs |
| 2007 | Re-Transfer of ECEC to the Ministry of Social Affairs, now called Ministry for Welfare (including health) |
| 2009 | Compulsory school entry age lowered to age 6 instead of previous age 7 |
| 2010–2011 | Transfer of responsibility for ECEC back to Ministry of Social and Domestic Affairs and subsequently to the Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration |
| 2011–2013 | First transfer of national responsibility for ECEC to the <i>Education</i> Ministry (Ministry of Children and Education), followed by re-transfer to the Social Affairs domain two years later under the Ministry for Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs. |
| 2015 | Second transfer of national responsibility for ECEC to the Education sector, now under the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality. |
| 2016 | Re-transfer to the Social Affairs domain in late 2016; ECEC now under the auspices of the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs. |

¹ **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4, and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. An additional relevant format for Denmark is **0–5** years, referring to the age-integrated ECEC centres.



| | |
|------|---|
| 2018 | Amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (<i>Dagtilbudsloven</i> – previously Day Care Facilities Act) are adopted, to be fully implemented by 2020. The amendments include additional specifications in terms of the pedagogical foundations of ECEC (play, concept of learning, view of the child, etc.). A revised version of the curricular framework for ECEC (<i>The strengthened pedagogical curriculum</i>) is issued. |
| 2020 | Following a change of government, ECEC is re-allocated to the new Ministry of Children and Education. |
| 2021 | A ministerial decree on staff-child ratio minimum standards and strengthened monitoring of ECEC was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (<i>Dagtilbudsloven</i>). Fully implemented by 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age. |

Sources: Borchorst 2009; Naumann et al. 2013; Willekens und Scheiwe 2020.

ECEC system type and auspices²

Denmark has a unitary system of early childhood education and care for children aged 6 months (26 weeks) up to 6 years. Traditionally under the jurisdiction of Social Welfare, since 2020 the responsible authority at the national level is the Ministry of Children and Education (*Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet*). The funding, organisation and regulation of early childhood provision is the responsibility of the 98 municipalities. Early childhood services include both age-integrated ECEC centres (0–5 years) and age-separated settings (0–2 years, 3–5 years), as well as regulated home-based provision.

General objectives and legislative framework

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Dagtilbudsloven*), last amended in 2022, regulates early childhood services, including home-based childcare, and also school-age childcare and other forms of socio-pedagogic provision for young people. It specifies that the local municipal authorities are responsible for formulating the targets and creating an administrative framework for services for young children, including children with disabilities or with other support needs.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the general purposes of early childhood services are to create – in cooperation with parents – a setting that benefits the well-being, development and learning of children; to provide families with flexibility and choice of provision so that they can organise their family and working lives according to their needs and wishes; to integrate preventive and supportive services for children with special needs and disabilities; and to create coherence and continuity in transitioning from one form of provision to another. One of the requirements for service providers is to ensure that children have opportunities of joint influence and responsibility in the ECEC setting in order to gain understanding and experience of democracy. ECEC settings are expected to support children’s independence and their ability to participate in a rule-based community, thus strengthening their integration into Danish society (Ministry of Children and Education 2022).

² The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Denmark provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Denmark has a system of universal entitlement to a fee-paying, full-time place in publicly subsidised early childhood provision, starting when the children are 26 weeks old. Municipalities have a duty to provide ECEC services for all children between the age of six months and the start of primary school. Attendance is not compulsory.

Statutory schooling begins at age 6.

Main types of provision

ECEC settings (*daginstitutioner* – ‘day institutions’) may be age-integrated, from 26 weeks up to compulsory school age (6), or age-separated for the younger (0–2) and older (3–5) children. Typical opening hours on weekdays are from 6:30 to 17:00, which tend to cover parents’ full-time working hours (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 50). Specific types of setting are:

ECEC centres (*aldersintegrerede institutioner*) for children aged just over 6 months up to school entry are the most common type of provision. Some also provide school-age childcare. In 2014, age-integrated centres accounted for just over 63% of all centre-based settings, while kindergartens account for approximately 31% and nurseries for nearly 6% (Statistics Denmark 2017). Since 2018, however, no separate national statistics are compiled for the age-integrated centres.

Nurseries (*vuggestuer* – ‘cradle room’) provide places for children up to age 3.

Kindergartens (*børnehaver* – ‘children’s garden’) are settings for 3 to under 6 year-olds.

Home-based childcare (*dagpleje*) provision is mostly organised, funded and regulated by the local authority. In general, it is for children up to age 3, but can also include children up to age 6. Up to five children are allocated to one home-based provider. Private home-based care arrangements operate according to an agreement with the local authority, which provides a per capita subsidy and also supervision.

Provider structures

The majority of ECEC settings in Denmark are provided and run by the municipalities. Some are independent and self-governing but still run in close co-operation with the municipality. However, a growing number of ECEC centres (13.8% in 2022) are now privately owned and are run by parents, associations, or businesses, with subsidies from the local authorities.

In 2022, 2,266 ECEC providers managed a total of 3,910 centre-based settings. Since 2017, both the number of providers (from 2,199 in 2017) and the number of settings (from 3,964 in 2017) have increased (Statistics Denmark 2017, 2023a, BOERN 4).

In 2022, well over half of ECEC providers (57.1%) were public/municipal, almost one fifth (17.7%) were independent and one quarter (25.1%) were private persons or entities. All forms of private settings are subsidised by the state, although the amount can differ between those classified as independent and those classified as private. The greater majority of settings (72.8%) are run by municipalities; just over one quarter of all settings are run by independent or private providers.

Table 1

Denmark: Number and distribution of ECEC settings by centre type and ownership, 2022

| Ownership/Provider | Number of settings 'at parental committee level'* | Share, in % | Number of settings 'at unit level'* | Share, in % |
|---|---|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Public/municipal | 1,295 | 57.1 | 2,846 | 72.8 |
| Private non-profit, some self-governing ('independent') | 401 | 17.7 | 484 | 12.4 |
| Privately governed and publicly subsidised | 569 | 25.1 | 580 | 14.8 |
| Total | 2,266 | | 3,910 | |

Source: Statistics Denmark 2023a, BOERN 4, own calculations

* In the Danish ECEC register, a distinction is made between ECEC institution (corresponding to the parental committee level) and local ECEC settings (corresponding to unit level). All local ECEC settings are linked to and managed by an ECEC institution with a parental committee.

In 2021, the majority both of children under 3 years of age and over 3 years of age were enrolled in publicly funded ECEC provision (see Table 2).

Table 2

Denmark: Number of children in centre-based settings by age and provider, 2021

| Provider type | Under 3 year-olds | | 3 years to school entry age | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| | Number of children | In per cent | Number of children | In per cent |
| Public | 86,572 | 85 | 140,940 | 78 |
| Private, state subsidised | 15,237 | 15 | 39,810 | 22 |
| Total | 101,809 | | 180,750 | |

Source: Eurostat 2023f

Participation rates in regulated provision

Overall, 75,297 children under 2 years of age and 160,080 from 3 to 5 years were enrolled in centre-based ECEC settings in 2022. 25,732 children were cared for in a home-based setting (Statistics Denmark 2023a, BOERN2, own calculations). In the same year, 6,232 children under age 3 and 18,673 of the 3- to 5 year-olds attended a private setting (Statistics Denmark 2023a, PBOERN2).

According to Eurostat data, the participation rates of children under 3 years of age in centre-based settings remained almost the same from 2005 to 2022 (74% and 74.3%), as were those of children aged 3 to 6 (94% and 93.4%). The majority of both age groups spent more than 30 hours per week in an ECEC setting in 2022 (see Table 3).

Table 3

Denmark: Participation rates in centre-based ECEC provision according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

| Year | Weekly attendance | 0 to under 3 years in % | 3 years to minimum compulsory school age in % |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 2005 | 1 to 29 hours | 13 | 15 |
| | Over 30 hours | 60 | 79 |

| Year | Weekly attendance | 0 to under 3 years in % | 3 years to minimum compulsory school age in % |
|------|----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| | No enrolment in ECEC | 27 | 5 |
| 2010 | 1 to 29 hours | 10 | 15 |
| | Over 30 hours | 68 | 75 |
| | No enrolment in ECEC | 23 | 10 |
| 2015 | 1 to 29 hours | 7.7 | 9.2 |
| | Over 30 hours | 69.6 | 88.0 |
| | No enrolment in ECEC | 22.7 | 2.7 |
| 2022 | 1 to 29 hours | 6.8 | 5.5 |
| | Over 30 hours | 67.9 | 87.9 |
| | No enrolment in ECEC | 25.3 | 6.6 |

Source: Eurostat 2023d, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

Across Europe, Denmark has the highest participation rates of under 3 year-olds in publicly subsidised ECEC provision (Jensen 2018). In 2021, 86.5% of 2 year-olds and over 97% of the over 3 year-olds attended an ECEC setting (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Denmark: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings, by age, 2021

| Age | Number of children in ISCED-01 settings | Enrolment rates in ISCED 01 settings, in % | Number of children in ISCED-02 settings | Enrolment rates in ISCED 02 settings, in % |
|---------------|---|--|---|--|
| Under 2 years | 46,747 | 38.1 | | |
| 2 year-olds | 53,624 | 86.5 | | |
| 3 year-olds | 1,424 | 2.3 | 58,060 | 93.4 |
| 4 year-olds | 11 | | 61,212 | 97.4 |
| 5 year-olds | 3 | | 57,942 | 97.0 |
| 6 year-olds | | | 3,518 | 6.0 |

Source: Eurostat 2023b, I

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1.24% of GDP in 2019, 0.8% was allocated to provision for under 3 year-olds and 0.4% for 3 to 5 year-olds (OECD 2023).

ECEC settings in Denmark are fee-paying. The local authorities receive block grants funded by the state. A place in a municipal ECEC setting is funded primarily through a municipal, tax-funded subsidy (per capita funding), and the parents pay the remainder. However, the parental fee is not allowed to exceed 25% of the gross operating costs. The subsidies are paid directly to the ECEC centre and are reviewed annually. At least 75% of funding is therefore public, excluding rent and maintenance.

Fees in ECEC settings (both centre-based and home-based) are income-related and also vary according to the child's age. The parents pay lower fees or no fees if their income is below a certain limit – and the local authority pays an additional aided place subsidy in such cases. Two other reasons for reduced fees are if the child already has siblings in an ECEC centre and/or school-age childcare provision or if the child is deemed to have special educational and support



needs. In 2023, the average monthly fee charged for children aged 0 to 2 years was €465 in *daginstitutioner*, for children aged 3 to 6 years €259 (see Table 5), slightly higher if lunch was included. Parents receive financial support if they enrol their children in private settings; in 2022, 9,723 children and 9,635 families were affected (Statistics Denmark 2023a, DAGTIL4).

Table 5

Denmark: Average fees in centre-based municipal ECEC settings, 2023

| Type of setting | DKK | €/year ³ | €/month |
|--------------------------|--------|---------------------|---------|
| Nursery (0–2 years) | 41,582 | 5,577 | 465 |
| Kindergarten (3–5 years) | 23,214 | 3,113 | 259 |

Note: The yearly rates are the rates decided by the municipalities. The figures have been corrected in cases where one or more months are free of payment. The actual fees paid are often lower than the monthly rates shown, since families with more than one child, low-income families, etc., are eligible for reduced rates.

Source: Statistics Denmark 2023a, RES88, own calculations

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 8% of net household income on childcare costs⁴ (OECD.Stat 2023).

Private ECEC centres can fix the charges made to parents, and consequently these may be higher than the fees for a place in a local authority centre. The subsidy granted by the local council for a place in a private ECEC centre consists of an operating subsidy, a building subsidy and an administration contribution. The total subsidy is paid to the centre and not to the parents. Municipalities are obliged to publish the costs for a place in ECEC.

Staff to child ratios and group size

Denmark is one of the few European countries which have no national regulations on either the number of children per staff member or on the maximum group size. Even so, staff to child ratios on average compare favourably with many other European countries. Local authorities and ECEC centres decide on staff deployment and group size according to the local situation. The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 2020 explicitly states that when preparing the pedagogical curriculum “... the composition of the group of children shall be taken into consideration”.

In December 2021, an amendment on minimum standards for the staff to child ratio was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. As from 2024, at least one adult must be present for every three children aged 0 to 2 years and for every six children aged 3 to 5 years (Ministry of Children and Education 2022, Ministry of Employment 2023).

Usually, there are 12 children in nursery groups and 24 in kindergarten groups. In family day care, one person cares for three to five children (Juhl 2018).

In 2022, the staff to child ratio was on average 2.9 children (0–2 years) per full-time staff member and for children aged 3 to 5 years 5.6 children and 3.3 children in home-based provision (Statistics Denmark 2023a, BOERN3). After a period of higher numbers of children to one member of staff through personnel shortages, ratios have improved slightly over the last five years.

³ Conversion rate December 2023

⁴ The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.



Curricular framework

As in many European countries, the underlying principles of Danish kindergarten philosophy can be traced back to the ideas and theories of Froebel and also Montessori, with adaptations to Scandinavian culture (Jensen and Langsted 2010). A major educational goal is to help children become aware that they can actively influence what happens in their immediate surroundings.

Denmark was the last of the Nordic countries to take the step of introducing a formal curricular framework (*pædagogisk læreplan*). In 2018, commissioned by the top-level ministry, the original curricular framework (2004) was revised by a group of experts, stakeholders and practitioners within the pedagogical field. It is now called “The strengthened pedagogical curriculum” (Ministry of Children and Education 2020). Since 2004, all ECEC settings are required to prepare a centre-specific pedagogical learning plan. In this way, each ECEC setting can take into account the specific context such as the composition of the child group (age, gender, disabilities, cultural differences, family backgrounds, etc.) as well as the specific location and physical facilities. ECEC settings are also required to document the learning and development of 0 to under 6 year-olds. Certain basic principles form a common pedagogical foundation. These include: an image of the child as unique; listening to and taking into account the child’s perspective; viewing play as an integral part of ECEC activities; having a broad understanding of learning through play, relationships, planned activities and exploration of nature – and by being challenged; viewing the group as a learning community; creating a safe and stimulating pedagogical learning environment; cooperating with parents with a focus on enhancing the child's well-being and learning; providing for vulnerable children; and ensuring continuity with school by supporting children's social skills, confidence in their own ability, and curiosity.

Staff are required to relate their pedagogy to six main themes: (1) comprehensive personal development; (2) social development; (3) communication and language; (4) body, senses and motion; (5) nature, outdoor life and natural phenomena (science); (6) culture, aesthetics and community (Ministry of Children and Education 2020). It is interesting to note that neither reading literacy nor mathematics are explicitly included as learning areas in this framework. At the same time, it is stated that “...the pedagogical learning environment for the oldest children should also introduce and allow the children to develop their curiosity towards, letters, numbers, patterns, shapes” (Ministry of Children and Education 2020, 27).

The ECEC centre head is responsible for preparing the centre-specific pedagogical plan, which has to be approved by the local council. It is also the centre head’s responsibility to make the curricular framework known publicly, e.g. on the centre’s website, and for evaluating it annually. At the centre management level, both in public and private settings, a bi-annual review is required which includes the parent board in the evaluation and includes their suggestions for follow-up.

Digital education

In the home environment, Danish children are given access to digital media and technologies at a very early age. More than 90% of children under the age of 7 have access to a tablet in the home. Although ICT use is encouraged by government policies, in ECEC settings there are large differences in use and implementation (Chaudron et al. 2018, 117ff).

The revised pedagogical curriculum (2018) states that ECEC activities should be meaningful and challenging and provide a basis for how children understand and act in a digital and global world. However, no specific digital competences are elaborated. The curriculum refers to the use of



digital tools, but in a general way. GPS, digital scales, webcams, etc. are mentioned as possibilities for supporting children to develop a creative, productive and critical approach to the use of digital technologies (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

Monitoring – evaluation

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care stipulates that the municipalities are responsible for carrying out evaluations in ECEC and ensuring that content and pedagogical activities are carried out in accordance with the law (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 123). However, they have different approaches and traditions in terms of monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, policy perspectives and those of research contexts tend to differ. For example, policy-related discussions on quality pay only little attention to children's play and participation – in favour of promoting academic skills through structured learning activities that can be measured (Juhl 2018).

Child-related assessment

Denmark does not have a long tradition of formal child-related assessment. However, since 2007, the municipalities are required to conduct language assessments of 3 year-old children in ECEC to assess whether a child needs additional language stimulation. Assessments are also required for children not attending an ECEC service and the municipalities are obliged to provide language support if this is considered necessary. Completing a form to assess vocabulary and sentence construction is mandatory for staff and parents when children are 3 years old, sometimes when they are 2 years old (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019).

Centre-level assessment

The centre leader is responsible for establishing a culture of evaluation in the setting and has a duty to carry out a centre-level assessment at least every other year (Ministry of Children and Education 2020). The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care specifies that parents must be involved in the development, evaluation and follow up of the setting's curriculum, but it is up to the municipalities and ECEC settings to decide how this should be carried out. The way the internal evaluations are used is a matter for the individual ECEC setting

The revised curricular framework (2018) states that the learning environment in the ECEC centre is to be evaluated from a child's perspective, and that the children's experiences of their environment should be taken into account (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

External evaluation

The national institute for educational evaluation, *Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut – EVA*, compiles, analyses and disseminates knowledge about early childhood education and care. The general focus is on evaluation studies of topics of nationwide importance, such as quality management, children's perspectives, evaluation culture, and transitions. Currently (2021), EVA is providing ECEC settings with online guidance for assessing the centre-level implementation of the curriculum with a document on “Questions you can use to evaluate the work with the pedagogical learning plan” (EVA 2021).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The guiding principle in Denmark for young children with disabilities and additional educational needs is to make it possible for them to attend mainstream ECEC settings. The local authorities are responsible for ensuring that ECEC centres provide the supports necessary for enhancing the children's integration. Sometimes children with disabilities are placed in a separate group, in which the staff-child ratios are high and the pedagogues have access to specialised support staff. Across the education system, special needs education includes additional staffing for individualised support and personal assistance, counselling and technical aid.

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

According to Eurostat data, 9.6% of the population in 2022 had a non-Danish citizenship and 41.9% of this group came from another EU country. In the under-fives age-group, these shares were 10.2% and 38.9% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

At the beginning of 2023, national statistics report 12.7% of children under 6 years as having a non-Danish background. Of these, 33.5% came from other EU countries. Overall, most of the non-Danish children were from Syria (12.6%), followed by Romania and Ukraine (10.1% each).

Table 6

Denmark: Children under age 6 with a non-Danish background by country of origin, sorted by frequency, 2023

| Country of origin | Number of children under age 6 with a non-Danish background | Share of children's countries of origin among non-Danish population under 6 years of age |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Syria | 5,094 | 12.6 |
| Romania | 4,114 | 10.1 |
| Ukraine | 4,081 | 10.1 |
| Poland | 2,904 | 7.2 |
| India | 1,796 | 4.4 |
| Eritrea | 1,563 | 3.9 |
| Lithuania | 1,161 | 2.9 |
| Turkey | 1,147 | 2.8 |
| Germany | 1,128 | 2.8 |
| Pakistan | 1,044 | 2.6 |
| Other countries | 16,528 | 40.7 |
| Total | 40,560 | |

Source: Statistics Denmark 2023b, own calculations

For children with a background of migration the local authorities are obliged to offer language stimulation training from the age of 3 upwards. Since August 2004, this language support is compulsory. For children who do not attend some kind of ECEC provision, 15 hours per week of Danish language contact may be provided to families in their own home. Children attending an ECEC centre receive additional language support determined by a local evaluation.

Statistical data on Roma are not available, as the ethnic origin of persons is not registered in Denmark. The Council of Europe estimates that there are approximately 5,500 Roma living in Denmark (0.1% of the population). Denmark's policy on the Roma is based on equal treatment, to ensure that the Roma and Travellers have access to all mainstream services. Goals for active

inclusion, education level, employment rate and health in Denmark apply to Roma as well as to other groups with a minority ethnic background in Denmark.

Parental leave arrangements⁵

A new leave model was introduced for anyone who has given birth or adopted children on or after 2nd of August 2022 in order to support equality between men and women. Now, each parent is entitled to 24 weeks of leave after the birth of the child. Some of the weeks are earmarked and non-transferable (Ministry of Employment 2023).

Pregnancy and Maternity leave (*Graviditets og fødselsorlov*) is provided for 4 weeks before birth and 10 weeks after the child's birth. The first two weeks following birth are compulsory. The income-related remuneration has an upper limit of DKK 4,550 (€ 610.15). Eligibility for employees is dependent on having worked for at least 160 hours in the four months preceding the paid leave. Adapted regulations apply to self-employed persons, persons on a work placement following vocational training, unemployed persons, students and persons on sickness leave.

Fathers (and same-sex co-parents) are entitled to ten compulsory weeks **Paternity leave** (*Fædre/medmoderorlov*) under the same conditions, eight weeks of which are transferable.

Each parent is entitled to 14 weeks of **Parental leave** (*Forældreorlov*), which can be taken by both parents, also at the same time; nine weeks are non-transferable. Between eight and 13 weeks can also be taken at a later date. The 28 weeks can also be extended for reduced cash benefits. During this period, it is possible to work part time.

During Maternity, Paternity and Parental leave parents are protected against dismissal.

In terms of leave uptake, there are no disaggregated statistics on the proportion of parents using either Maternity, Paternity or Parental leave. The mother's formal education level and her position in the labour market are central to the way leave is divided between parents. Well-educated mothers take the shortest leave, whereas well-educated fathers take the longest leave. In 2021, 83% of mothers made use of leave with benefit: in 79% of cases both took leave (not necessarily at the same time). In 2021, mothers made use of 279.1 days on average.

The proportion of fathers taking leave has not changed since 2015. In 2021, 78% of eligible fathers took leave with benefit. Fathers who are on Parental leave together with their partner, took 35.6 days on average in 2021 (vs. 29.7 days in 2015).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Denmark

Country expert assessment by Anette Boye Koch

The ambition of Danish ECEC to ensure the well-being and participation of all children in strong child communities is challenged. In the context of the inclusion agenda, an increasing number of children in vulnerable situations in need of social or special pedagogical support are participating in general ECEC institutions (Baes-Jørgensen 2021). The municipalities aim to develop inclusive child environments in ECEC settings, but the task is found to have educational, governance and financial consequences that are demanding to meet under the current conditions.

ECEC managers estimate that the proportion of children in need of social and special pedagogical support in or outside general ECEC is greater today compared to five years ago. They also find

⁵ The brief information in this section is based mainly on the country note for Denmark by Tine Rostgaard and Anders Ejrnæs in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see References).

that the complexity of the special support has increased, and that the proportion of children in vulnerable situations due to impaired mental or psychological functioning has grown. The rise is partly due to an extended focus on inclusion of children in vulnerable situations in general ECEC settings, but also that child professionals have become more effective in diagnosing children (Baes-Jørgensen 2021). Until recently, Danish ECEC practices were designed to deal with a high degree of homogeneity in the group of children. With the inclusion of children in need of social and special pedagogical support, a rethink of ordinary pedagogical practices is required, as the ECEC communities need to become more flexible with increased room for diversity (Baes-Jørgensen 2021; Petersen 2022).

Pedagogues are experiencing a shortage of both resources and special pedagogical expertise and knowledge to carry out the task alongside aggravated staff-child ratios, having to produce learning plans and carrying out systematic evaluations. Consequently, they experience difficulties in offering children sufficient direct contact with adults in general. It is also arduous to get the needed help for children in vulnerable situations, as economical resources are tight and the time to write applications for extra support has to be taken out of the daily quota (Baes-Jørgensen 2021).

When asked, Pedagogues say they lack the time and specific skills to detect and investigate the children they are concerned about, and to initiate the needed cooperation with parents and interdisciplinary experts. Consequently, they end up working at the individual level and detect challenges in individual children rather than to ideally work purposefully with the child community (Baes-Jørgensen 2021).

Demographic data

Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the population in Denmark totalled 5,873,420, representing a gradual increase since 2000 (2000: 5,330,020; 2010: 5,534,738; 2020: 5,822,763) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.72, Denmark was well above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023e)⁶.

⁶ Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>).

Children under age 6

Table 7

Denmark: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

| Age | Number of children |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| under 1 year-olds | 63,602 |
| 1 year-olds | 61,514 |
| 2 year-olds | 61,864 |
| 3 year-olds | 62,135 |
| 4 year-olds | 62,297 |
| 5 year-olds | 62,893 |
| Total 0 to under 6 year-olds | 374,305 |

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.2% of the total population were children under age 3 and 6.4% children under age 6. Compared to the respective EU averages, these proportions have always been higher than average since 2000 (Table 8).

Table 8

Denmark: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022

| Year | Comparison Denmark/EU | Under 3 year-olds | 3 to under 6 year-olds | 0 to under 6 year-olds |
|------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 2000 | Denmark | 3.8 | 4.0 | 7.7 |
| | Ø EU15 ⁷ | 3.2 | 3.2 | 6.4 |
| 2005 | Denmark | 3.6 | 3.7 | 7.3 |
| | Ø EU25 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 6.2 |
| 2015 | Denmark | 3.1 | 3.4 | 6.4 |
| | Ø EU28 | 3.0 | 3.2 | 6.2 |
| 2022 | Denmark | 3.2 | 3.2 | 6.4 |
| | Ø EU27(2020) | 2.7 | 2.9 | 5.7 |

Source: Eurostat 2023a, own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, more than half (51.8%) of households with children under 6 years of age are couple households. 12.3% of all households are single households, whereby the proportion of single mother households (8.6%) is significantly higher than of single father households (3.8%).

Table 9

Denmark: Households with children under age 6, 2022

| Household type | Total households | Total households, in %* |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| All households | 447,100 | |
| Couple households | 231,600 | 51.8 |
| Other household type | 160,200 | 35.8 |
| Single households, total | 55,200 | 12.3 |

⁷ The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

| Household type | Total households | Total households, in %* |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Single households, women | 38,300 | 8.6 |
| Single households, men | 16,900 | 3.8 |

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *own calculation

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Denmark, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 82.7% and for women 78.1% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 79.5% of women and 88.6% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both the shares of employed mothers and fathers were above the EU-average, especially that of mothers (63.6% and 87.2% respectively) (Eurostat 2023i, own calculations).

Table 10a

Denmark: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

| | 2010 | |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|
| | Mothers in % | Fathers in % |
| Denmark | 82.7 | 90.2 |
| Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁸ | Denmark: 82.7 | Netherlands: 93.4 |
| Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries | Hungary: 31.7 | Latvia: 72.7 |
| | 2022 | |
| | Mothers in % | Fathers in % |
| Denmark | 79.5 | 88.6 |
| Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ⁹ | Luxembourg: 81.9 | Sweden: 95.1 |
| Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries | Czech Republic: 42.5 | Romania: 78.5 |

Source: Eurostat 2023i, own calculations

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b*.

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

| Countries | Parents with children under 6 years | | Overall employment rate | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| | Mothers in % | Fathers in % | Women in % | Men in % |
| *Norway (2022) | 82.9 | 94.3 | 75.4 | 80.1 |
| ***Russia (2021/2022) | 67.1 (2021) | k.A. | 55.6 (2022) | 70.4 (2022) |
| *Serbia (2022) | 64.4 | 78.3 | 57.9 | 71.0 |
| **Switzerland (2022/2023) | 46.9 | 95.3 | 60.0 61.1 (2023) | 83.5 84.2 (2023) |

⁸ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

⁹ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

| Countries | Parents with children under 6 years | | Overall employment rate | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Mothers in % | Fathers in % | Women in % | Men in % |
| +Ukraine (2021) | n.d. | n.d. | 60.7 | 69.9 |
| +++United Kingdom (2021/2023) | 75.6 | 92.1 | ++72.3 | ++79.2 |
| with dependent children | 72.4 | 93.1 | ++72.1 (2023) | ++79.4 (2023) |
| with children under 2 years | 70.7 | 95.0 | | |
| with children 3–4 years | | | | |

*Eurostat 2023i, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

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BRICS. 2023. *Joint Statistical Publication 2023*. https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/BRICS-2023-JSP_Final_Web.pdf

+ [SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022. *Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence*. <https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznmve.htm>

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹⁰

In 2022, 12.3% of the children under age 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a considerably lower proportion compared with the EU28 average of 23.3%. Overall, 17.1% of the total population in Denmark are categorised as being at risk of poverty or social exclusion (average: 21.6%). 6.4% of the children under 6 years suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020, compared to 2.8% of the total population (EU averages 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h).

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¹⁰ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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