

# Family day-care in Denmark







# Child-care in Denmark

Denmark is a small Scandinavian country with 5.4 million inhabitants.

Denmark is a welfare state with a high standard of living and good social conditions. One third of the gross national product is spent on social service.

One feature of modern Danish society is that parents have a high participation rate in the labour market. Both parents are employed full time in half the families with children younger than 6 years and 92 % of the mothers with such children are employed.

Families have an average of 1.8 children, and single parents head 16% of the families.

Denmark has a tradition for day-care extending more than a century. Day-care has expanded considerably in the last 40 years in connection with women's rapidly increasing participation in education and the labour market.

In 2007 about 375.000 preschool children 0-6 years old attend day-care, including family day-care, day nurseries and kindergartens.

Denmark's 98 municipalities are responsible for ensuring an adequate number of places in family day-care, day nurseries and kindergartens and for maintaining high quality. ■





# Family day-care

Family day-care is the predominant type of child-care for children younger than 3, whereas older children attend kindergartens.

About 63,500 children attend family day-care and 18,200 childminders and 1,200 supervisors are employed. All 98 municipalities have established family day-care.

Day-care is regulated by the Childminding Act, which entered into force in 2007. The Department of social services in each municipality is responsible for the day-care centres within the municipality. The Childminding Act requires municipalities to supervise day-care.

The childminder may care for a maximum of five children including children from absent childminders. ■

# Cost of day-care

The local authority has an expense per child in family day-care. The parents may pay 25% of this expense. ■

# History of the family day-care

The basis for family day-care in Denmark was established in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the need for day-care for children increased drastically. The reason was the growing demand for labour, and many women responded by taking up employment outside the home.

Family day-care was a way to provide the necessary child-care, and in 1964 the act on Child and Youth welfare established that the municipalities could subsidise independent family day-care.

Until 1980 family day-care was considered a stopgap solution or a supplement until the necessary number of day-care centres had been established. Although the number of day-care centres increased steadily, the urgent demand for family day-care continued.

In 1981, family day-care for children 0-2 years old was recognized on equal terms with other day-care options for this age group. ■



# How people become childminders

The qualified applicant is a mature and responsible person. Becoming a childminder in a private home requires no special education or training but requires some experience in taking care of children or having children of one's own. The personal resources, energy and social understanding of the applicant are also considered.

The whole family has to function well, and the childminder's spouse must accept the conditions of the new job.

The day-care home may be a house or a flat with enough rooms for the children to play freely. There has to be space for extra beds, small chairs, toys and other equipment, and a good standard is also required. There must be green spaces in the community environment.

The police are requested to search for any recorded violations for every adult in the applicant's household.

Before the childminder is employed, a supervisor visits the home at least twice, and the spouse and children must be present at one of these visits.

The family has to agree to and understand that the home will become a workplace as well as a home and that other parents will be entering the home every day. The family also has to agree that some of the children may be of non-Danish ethnic origin. ■



# Activities in family day-care

Family day-care is generally open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Most children have eaten breakfast at home with their parents before they arrive at family day-care, but if they are hungry they will be fed at the day-care home.

All children normally arrive by 9:00 a.m., and then various activities take place. The morning activities are often outdoors, such as walking, shopping, going to the library, visiting a playroom or playing at a playground.

When lunch is finished, the children and the childminder rest for a couple of hours. The children usually sleep outdoors year round in their own pram. In the afternoon, the children are offered a snack and then play until their parents pick them up.

As parents often work long hours in Denmark, children must experience family life in day-care. The children are therefore involved in the usual activities of the day-care family, such as participating in preparing lunch, baking, helping to set the table before eating, clearing the table afterwards and other tasks.

During shopping expeditions, children are encouraged to help find the goods and to help to bring them home and put them away. They should participate in all the normal activities of daily life of a family within a relaxed atmosphere. ■



# Substitute childminders

A substitute childminder cares for children when the childminder (or her or his child) is sick, is taking in-service training courses or is on holiday or parental leave.

Each municipality organises substitute family day-care differently. The most common way is that the 5-7 childminders in a playroom group substitute for one another, which means that each child becomes familiar with the other childminders and their children.

Nevertheless, the children from the childminder who is absent are sent to different childminders, since each childminder may not care for more than five children at a time.

A more expensive but better way to organise substitute day-care is to employ regular substitute childminders who do not care for any children on a regular basis. In this case, the substitute can care for all the children from an absent childminder. The children will know the substitute childminder from regular attendance in the playroom group.

A new trend in Denmark is to establish a substitute day-care centre at which 2-4 childminders are employed to take care of groups of children from absent childminders.

This is new in Denmark and has been discussed extensively, because working in a centre is very different from working in a home, and a centre could be more like an institution. But negotiations between the trade union and the municipalities have resulted in some very high-quality substitute day-care centres, and this may therefore be how substitute day-care is organised in the future. ■

# Playroom groups

The childminders work in playroom groups of 5-7 living in the same neighbourhood. The group organises playroom activities, supplies childminders, plans excursions and holidays and organises other activities. Working in groups is very important to the childminders. Meetings in the group allow childminders to discuss work and the challenges of day-care with their colleagues.

The playroom groups are becoming increasingly autonomous, as the childminders organise activities and work plans themselves, achieving greater influence on and responsibility for their own working conditions.

The group meets in a playroom weekly or biweekly. The playroom has activities for the larger group of children such as physical play, singing, music, theatre performances and many other activities.

A great advantage of the playroom groups is that the children get to know the substitute childminders very well and the parents also get to know all the childminders in the group, which means that the substitute day-care is easier to organise and the parents are more satisfied. ■

# Supervision and supervisors

The municipalities are required to supervise family day-care. Supervisors employed by the municipal family day-care administration carry out the supervision. Family day-care supervisors have 3.5 years of education as an early childhood teacher.

The supervision includes regularly ensuring that the children are properly cared for. In addition, the supervisors continually advise childminders about their daily work to ensure that the children have positive experiences and that the childminders and the parents have a positive relationship.

The supervision is carried out where the children spend most of their time during day-care: in the home of the childminder or in the playroom groups.

The supervision is supplemented by group meetings and other collective information for childminders and parents.

## **The supervisors also:**

- employ and dismiss the childminders;
- supervise, support and inspect the childminders on visits to the day-care homes at least once or twice each month;
- visit the childminder with the parents before the child starts in order to inform the parents and ensure that the child has a good start in day-care;
- observe the physical and social development of the children;
- support the childminders' requirements for successful childminding, such as toys, diapers and prams;
- arrange excursions and other activities. ■



# Training

The Union (and most Danes) are proud of family day-care. It has a high level of quality, but still the Union has some problems in convincing the employers that childminders need training, and that the employers should take responsibility for offering training to the childminders to improve the quality of care.

## **Introductory course**

Many municipalities offer a 1-week introductory course to childminders before they start working. Unfortunately, the municipalities are not required to offer this, so in some municipalities the new childminders have to start working without being oriented. This concerns us in the Union. We want introductory courses to be compulsory, and we have negotiated for many years with the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark to make introductory, basic and advanced courses compulsory.

When an introductory course is offered, the new childminders learn about the local system and the working conditions in the day-care organisation. They also spend a day or two with an experienced childminder to see how she or he manages the work with children, parents and colleagues, so that new childminders can find creative solutions to the challenges associated with using the home as a workplace.

## **Basic course**

After childminders have worked for 6-12 months, they are offered a basic course of 2-3 weeks and later supplementary courses of 3 or 5 days on specific topics. All courses are held during working hours, and the childminders receive their usual salary while attending.

## **Basic training**

In 1997, the government initiated a new programme of basic training for those childminders without any qualifying education. This basic childminding training lasts for 42 weeks. In August 2008 the PGU will be replaced by a new childminding assistant education (2½ years). It is not compulsory, but the child-

minders can get an educational leave, during which they get an educational benefit (the same amount as the unemployment benefit) plus supplementary payments from the municipality. The annual income of childminders who complete the training increases considerably. ■





# Legislation

Family day-care is regulated by the Childminding Act which entered into force in 2007. Based on the objectives of the Act, each municipality establishes the objectives and framework of the local system of day-care. The objectives of the Act express society's expectations towards the day-care system, and are intended to inspire the municipalities.

## **Policy on childcare**

In co-operation with the parents, the day-care system provides children with care, and ensures that each child learns and develops social and general skills. Thus, the system is intended to strengthen the self-respect of the child and contribute to a positive and secure childhood. The day-care system should promote events and activities that stimulate children's fantasy and creativity and the development of language. Day-care should allow children to play and learn, to develop physically, and to explore their surroundings. The day-care system should ensure that children can exercise their right to be consulted, and have the opportunity to share responsibility, thus developing their independence and their ability to live in solidarity with other people. ■

### **The Childminding act**

§ 19-§ 22. Local authorities can offer child-care to take place in private homes or other homelike premises, which have been approved by the local authorities for this purpose. Each family day-care may receive up till 5 children. If the family day-care is attended to by more than one person, the family day-care may receive up till 10 children. The local authorities can decide that any of the child-minder's own children below 3 years old can be included in the number of children for which the child-minder is paid. This decision cannot be referred to any other administrative authority.

# Influence on work and working conditions

The childminders and the supervisors have a great deal of influence in organising their job. Every family day-care group has a works committee in which childminders and supervisors co-operate and discuss working conditions.

Besides minding the children, the childminders have administrative tasks such as communicating with the municipality, preparing a budget for the playroom group, planning alternative care for children when the childminders are on holiday, planning excursions and other activities. ■

## Parents' boards

The discussions on local democracy in recent years have resulted in legislation mandating parents' boards in family day-care and day-care centres. The boards have influence, determining the basic principles for the childminding and activities in family day-care. The principles concern family day-care as a whole, whereas the conditions in individual homes are a matter between the childminder, the parents and the supervisor. ■

### **Childminding act**

§ 14. In all public institutions for children and in the public family day-care a board with a majority of parents must be established. The employees in the institutions must be represented in the board.

The municipality can decide whether the staff members should have the right to vote.





# General agreement

A general agreement regulates the working conditions and salaries for childminders in family day-care. The general agreement is negotiated every third year.

## Working hours

A full-time job in Denmark comprises 37 working hours per week. This, however, does not apply to childminders working in their private homes. Because parents working full time have a long total time away from their children (working plus transport time) a full-time childminder must work 48 hours a week and a part-time childminder works 36 hours per week. The maximum number of working hours in one day is 11 hours.

- 99,4% of the childminders work full time;
- 95% of the childminders have 4 children in day-care;
- 0,6% has 4 part-time children in day-care;
- 1,9% have 3 children in day-care (employment with only 3 children came to an end in 2005);
- 0,7% are employed as substitute childminders;
- 2% are private childminders.

## Holidays and other entitlements

The general agreement also secures childminders the rights to: 6 weeks of holiday fully paid, full pay during sickness, maternity leave, the first and second day off when the childminder's own child gets ill, and 12,60% of the salary for pension. In connection with the general reduction of the working week in Denmark in 1987, the weekly number of working hours for childminders was to be reduced to 47. This was done by maintaining the 48-hour week and instead converting the extra hour to a total of 8 extra holidays per year. This agreement applies to all childminders employed in family day-care.

## Local agreements

The local union negotiates with the municipality annually to raise the salaries of childminders and supervisors according to the tasks, qualifications or performance of the individual employee.

**Tax deduction**

The childminders have a tax deduction of 46% of the income from day-care to cover the costs of children's meals, wear and tear on the home, higher utility bills and other expenses.

**Overtime**

A 50% overtime premium is paid for any working hours exceeding 48 hours per week. European Union legislation stipulates that employees may not get paid for this but must take this as compensatory time another week.

**Staff meetings**

The childminders are required to participate in four evening meetings per year unless they are ill or on holiday.

They earn one half day of compensatory time for each meeting, a total of 2 days per year if they attend all four meetings. If the meeting extends 3 hours, they earn 1 hour of compensatory time per hour. ■



# Union members

Ninety-nine per cent of the employees in family day-care are organised in the Union FOA – Trade and Labour. The Union has negotiated general agreements for the childminders since 1971 and for the supervisors since 1970. Working conditions, training and development are also very important in the Union's work for the childminders and the supervisors.

The Union has four sectors, and the childminders and the supervisors are members of the Childcare Education Services Sector. Having the employees and supervisors in the same union has been a challenge over the years, but family day-care as a whole benefits from this co-operation. Education, quality in childminding, physical and mental working conditions and development in family day-care are some of the important issues for the Childcare Education Services Sector. ■











**FOA**  
FAGOGARBEIDE

FOA – Trade and Labour

Childcare Education  
Services Sector  
Stauings Plads 1–3  
DK-1790 Copenhagen V  
Denmark  
Tel.: +45 46 97 26 26  
E-mail: sektorerne@foa.dk  
Web: [www.foa.dk](http://www.foa.dk)

This brochure describes Denmark's system of family day-care.

Family day-care is an educational and social child-care system for children younger than 3 years of age in Denmark.

Every day family day-care cares for about 63,500 children and employs 18,200 childminders and 1200 supervisors.

What is family day-care? What happens in family day-care? Who is employed? What do childminders and supervisors do? How much do they earn? What about training? What happens if the childminder is sick or on holiday? What is the role of the Danish Trade Union FOA – Trade and Labour?

This brochure answers these questions and comprehensively describes family day-care in Denmark.