

Denmark

Country Profile on the European Semester and COVID-19 crisis from a children's rights perspective

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13.2%

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2019

Children in Alternative Care - CiAC

	Total number of small residential settings	Number of children
Total number of children in alternative care		11,428 ¹
Residential care in 2019	370	4,660 ²
Children with disabilities & children 0-3		1,905 + 28
Number of children in family-based/foster care in 2015		7,540 ³
Number of unaccompanied minors in 2019		217 ⁴
Small Group Homes (SGHs)		1,501

¹ <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/ANBAAR15>

² More accurate information is not available. All Danish social services are registered in the national portal Tilbudsportalen, but they are registered after the services they provide and many have more than one service and thus appear as more than one institution or group home. Thus having no accurate figures for the number of institutions and group homes today, a guess is that there are approximately 120 institutions with an average of between 15-18 places, and approximately 250 group homes with an average of between eight to ten places for children and young people including 18 years and above.

³ Due to registration problems Statistics Denmark has said that they expect that from 2021 it will again be possible to distinguish between the different forms of foster care. 2015 is the last year where it is possible to find a divided statistic: Number of children in family-based/foster care: 5,936; Number of children in kinship care: 879.

⁴ Tal på udlændingeområdet pr. 30.09.2020.



Alternative recommendations

Supporting children and families in the short term:

- It is crucial that all children get back to school, day-care and other activities outside their home as soon as possible. Schools, sports clubs, communes must therefore try to reach out to the most vulnerable part of their communities and ensure that they are not left behind in this process. The re-opening of this structure will help to discover potential issues with children, such as domestic violence that is currently witnessing a stark increase.
- The government should provide families who suffered financially due to the lockdown period with financial aid. For instance, it

could prolong existing measures such as wage compensation, unemployment benefits or student loans for persons with low income. Furthermore, it should specifically support financially unstable families with children.

- It is important to make sure that children in vulnerable situations do not fall behind in school. Extra measures must be taken to make sure that these children are supported.
- It is crucial to keep supporting the most vulnerable groups of society.¹

Supporting children and families in the long term:

- The government should prepare an emergency plan in order to promptly react

if another lockdown should prove necessary, ensuring that children in vulnerable situations will be protected. In this regard, the government should ensure adequate educational equipment, especially for children in vulnerable situations, in order to ensure children's right to education during times of home schooling.

- The government should consider that focus on general health would benefit the population as a whole as well as the most vulnerable groups. Hand hygiene, open spaces, sleep, nutrition, outdoor activities and sports may help brake another wave.
- In Denmark, the number of child infections have dropped after the corona outbreak due to better hygiene and smaller groups of

children in child nurseries, day-cares and schools.

- With regard to day-care and children in vulnerable situations, factors such as smaller groups and the fact that children have been in "family groups" with one adult as a contact, instead of several, have had a positive impact on their well-being (FOA²). This insight should be taken into consideration by the government for the future.
- Remain focused on the value of supporting children and families in vulnerable situations to break the cycle of disadvantage, enable them to thrive and avoid larger costs in the future.

¹ As an example, see the agreement made by the Danish government and supporting parties that insures help for vulnerable groups: Aftale om initiativer for sårbare og udsatte grupper i forbindelse med COVID-19.

² Mindre børnegrupper har været godt for børnenes trivsel

Summary of Ratings

Government's support for families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Positive EU impact on more child-centred legislation at national level:



2020 Country-Specific Recommendations:



Government's efforts to provide sufficient resources and services for families and children:



Child Poverty

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The government's support to families and children during the crisis

The government provided financial aid for civil society organisations working with children in vulnerable situations. Additional student loans were made available and the period that unemployment benefits could be paid was extended by two months.

Furthermore, the government supported the labour market with a system of compensation for lost wages (lønkompensation).

Negative developments

Children and families had to face numerous challenges including unemployment and a lack of adequate equipment for home schooling such as computers and Wi-Fi connection. There was also

insufficient stimulation for children due to the lack of resources in their homes.

Civil society organisations (CSO's) had to deal with a number of hurdles such as difficulties in funding; a rising demand among children and families for basic necessities such as food and computers for home schooling and digital learning. CSO's also struggled to plan activities due to uncertainties about the future.

Good practice

Many civil society organisations provided financial aid, counselling and "activity" packages to use during lockdown. There have been a lot of examples of resourceful people who helped families with sick members and families in vulnerable situations by buying supplies and basic necessities or providing child care.

Several NGO's have made a big effort to give children in vulnerable situations and their families the opportunity to go to summer camps

after a long time without social contact with other children.

Challenges in supporting families and children

Many of the challenges that children were experiencing before the outbreak have been worryingly exacerbated. A telling example concerns psychological challenges such as depression, anxiety or stress. The following passage from an applicant for financial support is a good illustration of the many challenges the lockdown brought:

I am early retired and have chronic pains, a psychological disorder (borderline) and anxiety. I am, as many other families, under pressure because of corona. But my resources, both mental and physical, are a huge challenge. I have to be a full-time mum, aunt, teacher and replace the missing friends. My son usually attends boarding school and it definitely shows that I now have a teenager at home with a huge appetite. Besides that, I had to buy video games for the computer so he can play with his friends and be social in that way. My daughter has problems with her weight and therefore follows a special diet that is quite expensive. Besides that, she needs a lot of exercise so I have invested in outdoor activities that we all three can do together. I call that our physical education. I have also introduced cooking classes and at the same time I have to give feedback on their papers. All this takes extra energy from my side. I have to be able to accept that it is chaotic and not knowing what the future will bring reinforces my anxiety. So yes, I am working overtime both mentally, physically and economically.

Sources

- Survey³ about pedagogues' impression of children's well-being under Covid restrictions indicating that many children are thriving when activities are organised in smaller groups.
- Report⁴ from UNICEF showing that children in Danish schools are behaving very responsibly when it comes to keeping their distance and maintaining good hygiene. Three quarters say they miss their friends.
- A detailed report⁵ based on a survey in Danish schools showing that 92% miss their friends and almost as many miss their out-of-school activities. At the same time qualitative answers from the survey show that the children with mental challenges and their parents are having a harder time dealing with the schools' shut-down.



3 Mindre børnegrupper har været godt for børnenes trivsel

4 Børn og unge under Corona-krisen

5 Nødundervisning under corona-krisen – et elev- og forældreperspektiv

Policies for Investing in Children

National strategy to tackle child poverty

The former national poverty limit introduced in June 2013 was abolished in 2015. As of 2020, Denmark still does not have an official poverty threshold. Using the OECD definition of poverty, however, we can conclude that by 2017 child poverty was on the rise, with 64,500 children in families living below the poverty threshold. This was partly due to a 2016 piece of legislation known as 'the benefits ceiling' which put a cap on the total amount of income one person can receive in social benefits. This law heavily affected persons receiving unemployment benefits or integration benefits.

The government has taken measures to mitigate the rise in child poverty by introducing a temporary child benefit, active since January 2020, for persons who

have children from the age of 0-14 and are affected by the above-mentioned legislation. Furthermore, a commission has been formed with the purpose of re-evaluating the current unemployment benefit system.

Overall, the government does not have a national strategy to tackle child poverty. Time will tell whether the commission will come up with recommendations to ensure lower child poverty in Denmark.⁶ Without a national poverty target, as proposed in the sustainable development goals (SDGs), it seems very difficult to tackle child poverty without measuring it first. Having a national strategy, and first of all a national poverty limit, would make it easier to justify measures in order to help the most vulnerable.

Overall improvement in the protection of children's rights

The current government has introduced a temporary benefit for those under the benefit ceiling and migrants. This temporary benefit is supposed to remedy the rise in child poverty of the last five years caused by the reduction in unemployment benefits and the imposition of the benefit ceiling.

Unfortunately, the government's will to implement laws to improve the rights of children in vulnerable situations is not always reflected in reality. Children in care have been specifically targeted in these discussions. While we welcome the focus on children in care, the law proposes more early forced adoptions instead of preventive measures that could help families stay together and give the children lasting relations with their parents.⁷

Recommendations

- Introduce an official national poverty target, based for instance on the definition by EUROSTAT (AROE), or the OECD.
- Abolish the benefit ceiling.
- Apply a non-discriminatory principle when taking steps to abolish child poverty in Denmark.

EU influence on national developments

- The EU was inefficient in pressuring the government to implement child-centred legislation.
- The 2020 Country-Specific Recommendations were negatively evaluated. The recommendations encourage

⁶ The government has set out a plan to secure the most vulnerable in this time of crises: [Aftale om initiativer for sårbare og udsatte grupper i forbindelse med COVID-19](#).

⁷ Faktaark – "Barnet først".

the state to adopt all necessary measures to counter the pandemic and support the economy. But if it does not include measures that ensure help and support for the most vulnerable, the state will risk failing many families and children in need. The EU should highlight more efficiently the potential of *investing* in children in vulnerable situations, for which without adequate measures by the government inequalities will be carried into adulthood, creating further expenditures for the state.

Access to financial resources and services of high quality

The government reasonably ensured adequate resources and services to families and children. The Danish system of unemployment benefits is totally digitalised. This means that in order to seek the benefits you must be able to read, write and have computer skills. Many people in vulnerable positions do not have the necessary resources to figure out what types of help they are entitled to and what rules and laws to follow. The consequence is that often they

do not receive the help they need. This again has an impact on their children who will not have the same opportunities as their peers. This difference has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving behind many children in vulnerable situations.

Furthermore, only a very small number of children in vulnerable situations and adults on unemployment benefits do sport in their spare time. This is an issue for the general health of this group and a big challenge for the years to come.⁸

Recommendations for the government

- Support public housing.
- Help children in institutional care/family care to take an education.
- Provide additional help in schools with children in vulnerable positions.
- Support children in institutional care/family care in the passage from childhood to adulthood.

Children in Alternative Care (CiAC)

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Like many other countries, with the increased spread of COVID-19, Denmark closed schools changing to a web based approach. This has been a challenge for both children

and schools. Some schools have managed better than others in terms of quality, support and scope. Having found that discontinuing everyday life and teaching would have much worse impacts on children in vulnerable situations, schools for children with special needs, which are usually smaller than other schools, were held open

with guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus. The varied extent and quality of online teaching has also been a big challenge for group homes and institutions, as well as the absence of many possibilities for sports and leisure activities.

The Danish government decided to extend the first phase of a controlled

reopening in April 2020. Measures include the establishment of partnerships across authorities, civil society, cultural institutions, private actors and the public sector that can develop initiatives that counteract loneliness and vulnerability and support socially disadvantaged children and young people.

⁸ Danskernes Motions- Og Sportsvaner.Under Genåbningem; Socialt Udsatte I Idrætten... Definitioner og eksisterende viden.

New methods will be found to enable visits from family and relatives in a medically safe manner, and in the coming days, the parties will discuss the individual initiatives in more detail with the relevant ministers and authorities.

Children in vulnerable situations must return to school

The government has agreed to set aside DKK 60 million in 2020 for local efforts that can help close the academic gaps faced by students in vulnerable situations as a result of the closure, such as turbo courses, learning camps, specially designed teaching courses in the schools and extra homework cafes. The detailed implementation will be clarified and negotiated by the Ministry of Children and Education with the children and education spokespersons⁹.

In 2020 DKK 14 million were allocated to the preparatory basic education - FGU¹⁰ to

enable individual initiatives to be launched locally for students, who are particularly vulnerable to interruptions in their education. Moreover, a further DKK 10 million was allocated for renewed grants to selected voluntary organisations, sports associations and scout corps, including Lær for Livet, Julemærkehjemmene and Muskelsvindfonden. The funds must be used to strengthen the associations' and organisations' outreach work and efforts with a focus on children and young people in vulnerable situations: their learning and well-being in day care, school and leisure time, including homework and learning activities, leisure sessions, summer camps, family friends, etc.

The Family Court's child experts remained in contact with the children with the purpose of ensuring support and relief through a hand-held process and answering the child's questions. At the same time, insight is created into the

child's current situation and thus the opportunity to act if needed.

Families in vulnerable positions who are struggling on a daily basis with abuse, loneliness, mental or financial challenges, and who have had a particularly difficult time during the COVID-19 pandemic, could search for help from the following organisations: Mentorbarn, Børnehjælpsdagen, Børns Vilkår, Dansk Røde Kors, Blå Kors, Mødrehjælpen, KFUM's sociale arbejde, Red Barnet and Kirkens Korshær that received an extra funding of DKK 13.5 million in 2020. The funds can be used for purely practical things such as basic necessities, medicines and food, but also to reduce waiting lists, increase the organisations' outreach work and increase staffing for advice, help and support. Furthermore, voluntary social associations, sports associations and scout organisations as well as non-profit housing associations, folk high schools and cultural institutions, which hold holiday

stays for the target group, can apply for funding. The funds will support holiday stays, day trips or music and cultural events for families, children and young people in the summer of 2020, autumn of 2020 or in the winter of 2020/2021 to enable socially disadvantaged families and children to attend holiday camps or pursue day trips.

Very importantly, a Student Counselling programme was launched to initiate outreach activities as well as create additional opportunities for counselling of the most vulnerable and mentally vulnerable groups of students as well as for initiatives in connection with the gradual opening of the higher education institutions and for increased visibility of the Student Counselling's offers.

Preventing the unnecessary entry of children into alternative care

There is no indication of gatekeeping mechanisms other than those

⁹ Aftale om initiativer for sårbare og udsatte grupper i forbindelse med COVID-19.

¹⁰ The preparatory basic education (Forberedende Grunduddannelse - FGU) is aimed at young people who are under 25 years of age and are not yet ready to start or complete another upper secondary education. It can be for professional, personal or social reasons. The purpose of FGU is that you can subsequently continue on a vocational education, a high school education or in a job. FGU consists of different educational tracks, which can be adapted to your needs and interests.

existing in the Social Service Law. Prevention of placement and the aim of reuniting the child with the parents are fundamental in the law (though not always in practice).

The main reasons for children entering alternative care are: worrying behaviour by the child; significant or permanent impairment of physical or mental functioning in children; worrying behaviour of parents and other forms of neglect; school problems and abuse against a child¹¹.

Progress on child protection and care reform

Initially there was a mainstreaming of group homes in Denmark. In 1997, a survey showed that the average number of children in group homes was 5.6. Seventy-four percent were established by and around a couple living together with the children as a form of foster family with some staff assistance. In the past 20 years this has changed and the group homes have moved towards institutions. Most of them can be still categorised as 'small

group homes' that accommodate 8 – 10 children, and the rest, especially the largest, might more correctly according to UN definitions be called 'institutions'. According to their national organisation, the most common size of Danish institutions for children and young people is 20 – 24 places in four groups.

In February, the Ministry of Social Affairs stated that it intended to introduce a 'Law of the Child' to strengthen the efforts to support children and young people in vulnerable situations so that they receive the right help and support early in their lives. The starting point of the law is that the child exists in his or her own right and that their needs are put first to a greater extent. The Minister for Social Affairs has encouraged contributions to the work of writing the proposed law. However, this work has been postponed during the lockdown, but it was planned to continue it in August. Professionals, researchers and parent organisations have raised concerns that although many of the ideas behind the proposal are good, it has too little focus on the

connection between the child and their parents and the cooperation of the care setting, the local municipality and the birth family.

Care leavers

There is no indication of any special efforts to support specifically young care leavers during the pandemic.

It is supposed to be dealt with under the existing paragraph in the Social Service Law. According to Eurochild's Danish member the emphasis is unfortunately on "*can*" rather than "*must*" which makes it highly likely there will be differences between municipalities and insufficient support to many care leavers.

People working with aftercare observed young people finding it difficult to get in contact with local municipalities and case workers during the period where a lot of the municipal staff were working online or from home.

Children in migration

If granted asylum, migrant children are placed in a local municipality, which administers their case. The number of unaccompanied minors in the past five years has declined significantly from 2,144 in 2014 to 217 in 2019.

Currently, there is one Reception Centre in Denmark run by the Danish Red Cross on behalf of the Ministry of Foreigners and Integration. Here the unaccompanied minors stay for several days. Afterwards they are moved to one of the Refugee Children's Centres under the Ministry of Foreigners and Integration, run by one of the local municipalities where they stay while their case is examined by the Ministry. When their case has been settled they pass on to one of the local municipalities that decides where to place them. It can be in kinship care if they have relatives living in Denmark, foster care, group homes, institutions, supported independent living or other placements.

11 Udslagsgivende årsager til iværksatte anbringelser efter landsdel, årsag til anbringelse, alder og køn.

Due to the fall in unaccompanied minors there does not seem to be a shortage of places. However, the local authorities do not register these children separately from other children in the statistics of children placed in alternative care, so it is not possible to tell how many of the different options the children are placed in.

EU funds

At a national level, there gerenerally is a lack of knowledge of EU funds allocated for the implementation of a legislative and/or policy framework related to families in vulnerable situations and children in care.

For more information, please consult the [2020 Eurochild Report](#) or contact Enrico.Tormen@eurochild.org and Zuzana.Konradova@eurochild.org

