

# The Danish child care system

How universal child care in Denmark works



## Merete Villsen

Manager of the Early Childcare Department in Aalborg Municipality  
Master of Public Governance

Who owns childcare?

Who Should own childcare?

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg – April 4 and April 5, 2024

**Str<sup>o</sup>nger  
together**

# About me

## Merete Villsen

- Manager of the Early Childcare Department in Aalborg Municipality
- Member of the national board of The Children and Cultural Directors in municipalities
- Chair of the national network for Managers of Childcare Departments
- Board member of the Danish Childrens Research Scientific Panel
- Board member of the regional children's culture centre
- Kiol Executive –a high end public leadership course
- Master in public governance
- Qualified Pedagogue

[Merete.Villsen@aalborg.dk](mailto:Merete.Villsen@aalborg.dk)

– Feel free to contact me!



**Stronger  
together**

## DENMARK FACT

Population: 5,935,619

Capitol:  
Copenhagen,  
1.363.296 citizens

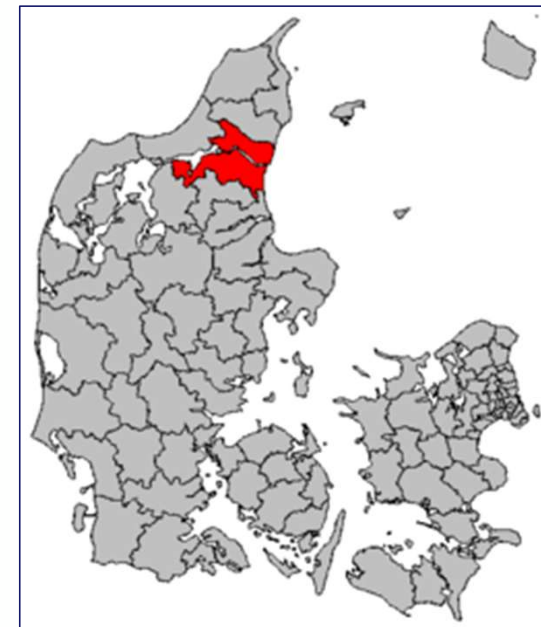


## AALBORG FACT

Citizens: 221.082

Third biggest  
municipality in  
Denmarks

Largest city:  
Aalborg,  
119.862 citizens



**Children  
and youth**

# Str<sup>o</sup>nger to<sup>o</sup>gether

**Learn  
Be  
Succeed  
Grow**



# Stronger together

## Shared vision for Children and Youth



- "No one is best alone" – That is the basic idea in the department of Children and Youth.
- Children and Youth is a relatively new department in Aalborg Municipality, which is composed of both the school and daycare areas, which previously functioned as two separate departments
- Children and Youth is part of a political organization where it is our responsibility to live up to political expectations
- [Stronger Together](#)



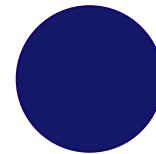
# ECEC in Denmark has two purposes

- It serves as a social service for the parents to provide them with flexibility and options to plan their everyday lives and work life
- It is also an educational and social institution with the purpose to promote welfare, development and learning for all children - no matter their family background
- All children are guaranteed access to an ECEC facility from the age of six months (26 weeks)
- Almost all children are in full-time daycare in DK (latest numbers from 2021):
- 92.3 % of children aged 1-2 are in ECEC
- 95.8 % of children aged 3-5 are in ECEC.



# The legal and organizational framework of ECEC

- The legal framework for ECEC is the “Act on ECEC”
- It is a framework legislation, meaning that the state has the overall responsibility, and the municipalities are responsible for the local organization of ECEC within the framework of the law
- The “Act on ECEC” elaborates the purpose of ECEC:
  - ECEC promotes well-being, development and learning
  - ECEC provides families with flexibility and options
  - ECEC supports children with low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds
  - ECEC creates coherence and continuity between facilities



**Str<sup>o</sup>nger  
together**

# Types of ECEC Facilities

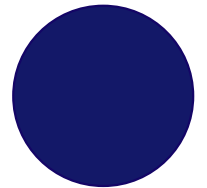
The municipalities run most of the facilities.

The municipalities typically provide four types of facilities:

- Public Family Childminding for children between 6 months to 3 years
- Nurseries for children between 6 months and 3 years
- Kindergartens for children between 3 years and school age
- Age-integrated facilities for children between 6 months and 6 years

Other than municipal-run facilities:

- Private day-care facilities run by private actors
- Independent day-care facility run by independent organisations



**Str<sup>o</sup>nger  
together**





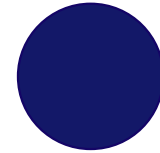
# The distribution of children in each type of ECEC facility in Denmark

- Public Family Childminding 9.7 %
- Public day-care facility 0-2s 21.6 %
- Public day-care facility 3-5s 48.9 %
- Independent day-care facility 0-2s 3.5 %
- Independent day-care facility 3-5s 7.7 %
- Private day-care facility 0-2s 2.1 %
- Private day-care facility 3-5s 6.4 %

*Latest numbers from 2021*



# Law on minimum child-staff ratio in ECECs



- The Danish parliament has adopted a law on minimum child-staff ratios in ECEC facilities that enters into force on 1 January 2024
- The mandatory minimum child-staff ratio will be:
  - three children per caretaker for 0-2 year olds (1:3)
  - six children per caretaker for 3 year olds to school start age (1:6)
- The municipalities will be compensated with approximately 330 million CAD extra annually in order to cover the expenses of employing additional caretakers from 2024 forward



## Development in the numbers of educated staff

- 57.9 % of the staff in 2019 were ECEC teachers. The number was 54.5 % in 2021
- For the educated ECEC teacher assistants, the numbers were 5,6 % in 2019 and 5,8 % in 2021
- The number for non-educated ECEC assistants rose from 32.5 % in 2019 to 35.9 % in 2021



# Funding and parental fees

- In Denmark the ECEC sector is primarily funded by income taxes and annual block grant to municipalities  
*Denmark is among the five OECD countries who spend most on ECEC (relative to our GDP)*
- The parental fees are dependent on the operating costs in each municipality, which can vary across them.
- It is regulated in the Danish Act on ECEC, that the municipalities must pay a minimum of 75 % of the operating cost, while the parents pay a maximum of 25 % (which is about 400-650 CAD for full-time ECEC per. month)
- Parents can receive a discount in their fees (up to 100 % of the costs) in a number of ways, e.g. if they have low incomes, there are single-parent discounts and through sibling discounts



# A national pedagogical curriculum

- In Denmark the ECEC sector is primarily funded by income taxes and annual block grant to municipalities  
The current national ECEC curriculum came into force in 2018

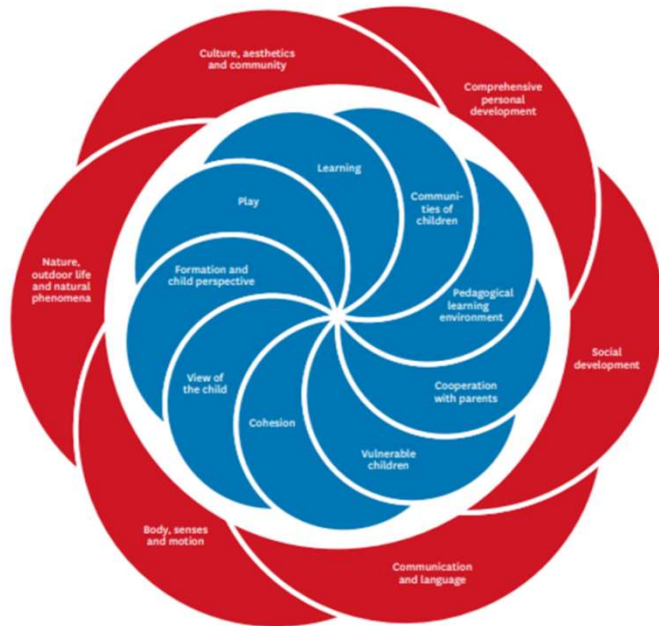
([https://emu.dk/sites/default/files/2021-03/8077%20SPL%20Hovedpublikation\\_UK\\_WEB%20FINAL-a.pdf](https://emu.dk/sites/default/files/2021-03/8077%20SPL%20Hovedpublikation_UK_WEB%20FINAL-a.pdf))

- The ECEC facilities have all developed a local pedagogical curriculum based on certain principles from the Act on ECEC, including a common pedagogical foundation and the six curriculum themes:
  - Personal development
  - Social development
  - Communication and language development
  - Body, senses and motion
  - Nature, science and outdoor activity
  - Culture, community and aesthetics



# A national pedagogical curriculum

## The strengthened pedagogical curriculum The common pedagogical foundation and the six curriculum themes



### Three central parts form the basis for preparation of the pedagogical curriculum

- The common pedagogical foundation
- The six curriculum themes
- Broad pedagogical objectives for the relationship between the learning environment and children's learning.



# The ECEC staff – educational level

The staff typically consists of:

- **ECEC teachers** (in Denmark called a “pedagogue”) hold a bachelor’s degree in Social Education.
- **Educated ECEC teacher assistants** (in Denmark called a “pedagogical assistant” or PA) have a vocational education.
  - The length of this education depends on prior skills and education.
- **Non-educated ECEC assistants**



# Bachelor in Social Education

## Length, structure and content

The purpose of the education is, that the student acquires relevant professional competences, knowledge and skills, to be able to manage, develop and convey development, learning and care assignments in a social perspective – both independently and in collaboration with others

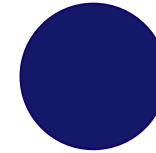
The training period for a pedagogue is 3.5 years, which consists roughly of 2.5 years of classroom-based education and one internship of 3 month two long internship periods of six months each

## The programme consists of two parts:

- a common part on basic professional competences
- a specialization part

The specialization part contains specialization course, three practicum periods, and a BA-project

The students acquires competences to participate in and lead developmental processes



**Str<sup>o</sup>nger  
together**



# Bachelor in Social Education

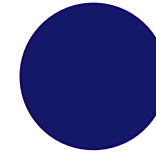
## Finances

The education costs are covered by the state and the programme is free for the student

The students are themselves responsible for acquiring the relevant educational material

The programme give the student right to receive Danish Education Support (about 1200 CAD per. month) according the applicable rules

Students receive salary for the programm's two final. Practical training periods



**Stranger  
together**

# The municipal supervision and inspection of day-care centers

- The inspection has two purpose – control and development
- The local council is responsible for the supervision and the inspection of the ECEC facilities – both through announced and unannounced visits
- The local council must ensure impartiality in the supervision
- The supervision must use both quantitative and qualitative data as well as observations
- As a part of the supervision, the local council must engage in dialogue with both the ECEC facility leader and the ECEC staff
- The local council must document the supervision in writing
- If the quality of the pedagogical learning environment or other circumstances in the ECEC facility is a cause of serious concern, the local council must implement stricter supervision and make an action plan in dialogue with the ECEC facility leader



# Thank you for your time!

Now... Talks and questions

