

Federal Foundation Mother and Child for pregnant women in emergency situations

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Introduction

The family is the foundation of children's growth and development, and children's living conditions are primarily their parents' responsibility. This is the fundamental principle of Danish child and family policy. However, it is the responsibility of the public authorities to support children at risk and their families in order to give them equal opportunities to have a independent life.

Support to families with children is granted by way of services allocated on the principle that anyone in need should have equal rights to the services, and by way of financial assistance to all families with children or assistance in special cases.

The various social protection schemes are implemented locally by the 98 local authorities and, to some extent, by the five regions. The local authorities have a vast degree of autonomy in their choice of policy measures and the organisation of services to be provided.

1) How do other countries deal with the poverty risk of young families/women, in particular single mothers, and are there any early preventive support measures or deliveries of assistance?

Danish children and their parents are ensured a broad range of services offering a good framework for their day-to-day welfare and everyday life. These services comprise a number of general services and schemes, including preventive health measures, day-care facilities, maternity leave of up to 52 weeks and family allowance. A number of policy areas are responsible for the initiatives, primarily social policy, family policy and the areas of health, justice and employment.

Complementarily to the general services offered, there are specialised services for citizens with special needs, including social services and special support schemes, see the Danish Act on Social Services, and services and treatment in the health sector; see the Danish Health Act.

A more detailed description is given below of the areas deemed to be particularly important as early and preventive support measures in relation to the group of single mothers.

High-quality day-care facilities

An important area for single parents and their opportunities is high-quality day-care facilities that flexibly improve single parents' possibilities of combining work life and family life.

Denmark has guaranteed day-care availability, meaning that all Danish children are offered day care. The government pays three-fourths of a child's care, but there are clear rules on financially aided places for children of single parents.

Sixty-six per cent of Danish children between the ages of zero and two years and 97 per cent of the three-to-five-year-olds have a place in a publicly supported day-care facility. The parental fee is 25% of budgeted gross operating expenditure for day-care services for children from newborn to age six. In addition, parents receive sibling rebates and are offered fully-aided places based on financial and socio-educational considerations.

Universal family allowance

Since 1987, all children and young people in Denmark under the age of 18 have received family allowance. The allowance is independent of income and tax-exempt and paid to the parents each quarter. Approximately 660,000 families receive family allowance for some 1.2 million children and young people. The table below shows the allowance in relation to age groups.

Age group	Annual allowance	Allowance per quarter
Family allowance, 0-2 years	DKK 16,988	DKK 4,247
Family allowance, 3-6 years	DKK 13,448	DKK 3,362
Family allowance, 7-17 years	DKK 10,580	DKK 2,645

Other extraordinary childcare benefits

Child maintenance

As previously mentioned, parents are under an obligation to maintain their children, taking into account the parents' living conditions and the welfare of the child. The duty to maintain the children also applies if the parents do not live together with the children. If, however, one of the parents does not observe the duty of maintenance, the regional state administration may order that parent to pay contributions towards the maintenance of the child – so-called child maintenance.

The duty of maintenance applies until the child reaches the age of 18. However, the duty ends, unless otherwise provided by the regional state administration, if the child contracts marriage before turning 18. The amount of the child maintenance is fixed in consideration of the welfare of the child and the parents' financial situation, including the parents' capacity for work. Besides contributions towards general maintenance, the regional state administration may also fix so-called special contributions – e.g. in connection with baptism, confirmation and education.

Students with childcare obligations (SU)

The Danish State Educational Grant and Loan Scheme (SU) is financial support offered to Danish students. A number of conditions must be met before SU support is granted. To receive SU support, the recipient must have reached the age of 18, be a Danish citizen, attend an SU-approved education or training programme and be an active student. Moreover, SU recipients must not receive other public cost-of-living assistance, and a limit applies to how much SU recipients may earn through after-school jobs, etc. (the earnings ceiling).

Parents who meet the general conditions for receiving SU support may receive special aid. There are two kinds of special aid to parents.

- Students who have become parents shortly before the start of their study programme (defined as twelve months before for women and six months before for men) or students who have children while studying are entitled to receive extra SU support.
- Students who are caregivers in respect of children may receive supplementary SU loans and in some cases be granted caregiver allowance and supplementary SU loans.

It is not possible to receive the above two types of support simultaneously. Besides the possibilities of receiving extra SU support, supplementary SU loans and caregiver allowances, parents also have a higher earnings ceiling and consequently the possibility of earning more besides the SU support than students without children. The earnings ceiling increases automatically by a fixed amount per year for each child under 18.

Preventive health schemes

The Danish Health Act includes rules on free preventive child examinations and health guidance by a general practitioner and the local health service, respectively, the latter consisting of health nurses and local authority doctor.

Health nurses primarily attend to children in the home during the first year of the child's life. In the intervening period until school age, contact to the health nurse is need-determined. General practitioners offer pre-school children seven preventive examinations. School-age children and young people must be offered both examinations and health interviews by a doctor or health nurse in connection with school start and school leaving.

2) Are there any benefits delivered by independent support schemes (such as the German Federal Foundation Mother and Child) or are there regular measures by the government which counterbalance this specific poverty risk of pregnant women?

In addition to the general rights and services mentioned under item 1) above, the measures offered to vulnerable pregnant women and mothers at risk of poverty are particularly aimed at improving women's social situation, e.g. by means of assistance to complete an education or training programme or finding employment.

Besides the general services offered in the education and employment areas, targeted projects may be initiated, the aim of which is to improve the life situation of young, single and vulnerable mothers. Such projects may be financed by pool funds, applied for by local authorities, private players or independent organisations.

For example, in 2008, funds were allocated to the "Equal Opportunities" initiative to strengthen the personal resources of children and young people who are disadvantaged or at risk of being disadvantaged as well as their parents, thus enabling them to create a meaningful life for themselves with complete personal responsibility.

Under the initiative, funds were allocated to outreach services for young, single and vulnerable mothers. The aim of the initiative is for young, single and vulnerable mothers to complete training or education and be integrated in the labour market. Attention is focused on taking a holistic approach to the mothers, offering them a range of services tailored to the individual mother. This may include practical support and support to social and personal needs such as the young, single and vulnerable mother's role as a parent, the welfare of the child, finances, housing, basic safety, identity, values and relations to the child's father and the professionals in the outreach facilities. Support may be obtained for a broad range of methods and method development initiatives that meet the young mothers' needs, such as guidance to parenting/child rearing, practical training schemes for mothers, mentor schemes, home-work help and network-creating activities.

Finally, another object is to document "good practice", which can be communicated to all local authorities in Denmark.

Another example is the private, humanitarian Mothers' Aid Organisation that advises and supports disadvantaged families. In 2006, the Mothers' Aid Organisation initiated a development project, "Project Get Going", the aim of which is to help and support young pregnant women and mothers into education, employment or training. The programme also offers the women support to parenting and help to establish a network.

The target group is: Pregnant women and mothers under age 25, who have no professional training or job or are at risk of dropping out of education or training or losing their job. The Mothers' Aid Organisation's "Project Get Going" offers a holistic and coherent approach to a disadvantaged group of young pregnant women and mothers. The project includes combinations of initiatives such as group meetings preparing the young women for parenting, mother and baby meetings, career counselling, voluntary mentors and socio-professional coordination – e.g. in relation to the area of family law (central government), prenatal care (regional government) and job centres and other local government initiatives. The project employs social workers, midwives, health nurses, education and careers advisers and psychologists. The grant for the project was recently extended for 2010-2013.

3) What projects or institutions are available that encourage women in such emergency situations to continue their pregnancy?

The Danish social system contains no specific rules or projects aimed at encouraging women not to terminate a pregnancy. But the women are entitled to counselling and guidance by a doctor; see the Health Act.

4) Which countries have a comparable system similar to the 'Early Prevention and Intervention for Parents and Children and Social Warning Systems' action programme (Host Country Paper 3.2.1.) that aims at an early and comprehensive child protection already starting in the context of birth?

The protection of children and young persons at risk is stated in the Act on Social Services. The overall objective is, at an early stage and on a continuing basis, to secure the best possible conditions for the upbringing of such children and young persons, thereby providing them with the same opportunities for self-expression, personal development, maturity and health as their contemporaries, despite their individual problems.

In 2007, a number of new rules entered into force in Danish social legislation, under which local authorities must make decisions on special support and initiatives during a pregnancy when this is considered to be of significant importance to the child's need for support after birth.

The right support - provided at an early stage and on a continuing basis

A precondition for early intervention when a child is at risk is to ensure that the local authorities identify warning signals and act accordingly.

The consolidation Act on Social Services clearly states that all civil servants, such as schoolteachers, child and youth educators and nurses, must notify the relevant authorities as soon as they become aware of factors that may pose a risk to the child.

A cohesive approach focusing on the needs and rights of the child

Within recent years, Danish legislation has been subject to a number of changes ensuring continuity and a strong focus on the needs and rights of the child.

As late as in October 2009, all political parties in the Danish Parliament but one agreed on the "Child's Reform" with a new set of legislative changes and initiatives. Through a number of initiatives, the reform emphasises the importance of close personal care, stable adult contact and relations when a child is placed outside the home. The reform furthermore strengthens the focus on early intervention and on the rights of the child, for example on issues such as the child's access to and contact with its parents. Additionally, the reform contains initiatives aiming to improve the quality of the special support provided to children at risk and their families. A comprehensive bill with the Child's Reform initiatives is expected to be passed by Parliament in early 2010.

As a result of the 2006 foster care-reform, legislation was strengthened by a number of requirements securing not only cohesive, but also individually targeted special support. One important improvement was how to secure that the individual needs of the child are taken adequately into consideration.

When a local authority assumes that a child is in need of special support and before making any decision on support, the local authority must make an overall investigation of factors relating to the child's or young person's development and behaviour, family, school, health, leisure time and other relevant issues.

The local authority furthermore has to make a comprehensive plan of action before deciding to place a child outside the home.

The child's or the young person's viewpoints must always be taken into consideration, and reasonable importance must be attached to their views, taking into account the child's age and maturity.

A wide range of measures

The local government may decide on a wide range of supportive measures, varying from preventive ones such as counselling, different forms of support in the home and family therapy. Supportive measures in the home may for instance be financial, parenting or other support, it may be residential accommodation for the custodial parent or other person having custody of the child or a relief care arrangement with a private network/foster family. Therapy programmes may include different types of evidence-based programmes such as The Incredible Years, Parental Management Training or similarly programmes enhancing the child's social skills and/or the parents' parental capacity.

If the child cannot remain in its own home, the local authority may also decide to place the child outside the home and, if necessary, by forcible removal if the child's health or development is obviously or likely to be jeopardised.