Denmark

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April 2013

For comparisons with other countries in this review – on demographic, economic, employment and gender equality indicators and on leave provision and early childhood education and care services - go to cross-country comparisons page on website. To contact authors of country notes, go to membership-list of members page on website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

Note on terminology: Graviditetsorlov is the leave to be taken by the mother before birth, Barselsorlov the leave reserved for the mother after birth, Fædreorlov the leave reserved for the father after birth, and Forældreorlov the leave available for both parents after birth. However, in the law the four leave schemes bear the same name Barselsorlov, or literally Childbirth Leave, because they technically all originate from the same law on leave.

a. Maternity leave (Graviditets and Barselsorlov: see ‘note on terminology’) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

- Eighteen weeks: four weeks before the birth and 14 weeks following birth. The first two weeks after birth are compulsory.

Payment and funding

- All employees are entitled to a daily cash benefits based on former earnings up to a ceiling of DKK801 (€107) per working day before taxes for full-time employees and self-employed, or DKK4,005 (€537) weekly.
- The cash benefit scheme is funded by the state from general taxation, except for first eight weeks when municipalities bear half of the cost.

Flexibility in use

- None.

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2 Conversion of local currency into Euros undertaken on 28 May 2013, using http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter/
Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)

- Eligibility to full compensation for an employee is based on a period of work of at least 120 hours in 13 weeks preceding the paid leave. Workers with temporary contracts are excluded only if they are not eligible for unemployment benefit.
- Eligibility for the cash benefit for self-employed workers (including helping a spouse) is based on professional activity on a certain scale for at least six months within the last 12 month period, of which one month immediately precedes the paid leave.
- People are eligible to the cash benefit who have just completed a vocational training course for a period of at least 18 months or who are doing a paid work placement as part of a vocational training course.
- Unemployed people are entitled to cash benefits from unemployment insurance or similar benefits (activation measures).
- Students are entitled to an extra 12 months educational benefit instead of the Maternity leave benefit.
- People on sickness benefit continue to receive this benefit which is the same amount as the Maternity leave benefit.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

- None. There is no additional leave for multiple births as the right to Maternity (and Paternity and Parental) leave is related to the event of birth and not the number of children born.

Additional note (e.g. if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone)

- In Denmark leave is not only regulated via national legislation, but also via collective agreements in the labour market and agreements at company level. About 75 per cent of the workforce are covered by such collective agreements, and these workers receive compensation during leave from their employer up to their former earnings, i.e. their employer tops up the state benefit. To help employers finance these costs, different leave reimbursement funds have been set up.
- In 1996 a leave fund was set up to reimburse private employers’ leave costs, so that the cost for compensation was pooled. Several municipal employers set up identical funds in the following years, and in 2005 it was made obligatory for all municipal employers. Municipal employers pool the costs of employees’ take-up of leave, so that a workplace with a predominance of female workers should not face higher costs. From 2006, private employers also have to be members of a leave fund. In the largest private leave fund, DA-Barsel, private employers pay DKK825 (€111) per year for each full-time employee and receive reimbursement of up to DKK160 (€21) per hour for up to 29 weeks; this means that female employees with a salary below DKK25,000 (€3,354) per month will be able to receive full earnings for up to 26 weeks, without direct cost to the employer. The additional cost of compensation for employees with higher salaries than DKK25,000 monthly has to be borne by the employer. Depending on the industry in question, the funds also cover full or parts of the Parental leave, e.g. within the industrial sector each parent is entitled to coverage for four weeks, and in addition three weeks can be shared.
- An evaluation of the funds covering the private sector in 2010 showed that around 100,000 companies were members of a fund. The report concluded that the funds seem to be beneficial for women - although employers did not believe that the fund had made them change their view on hiring women - and also that more men seemed to
take up leave as a consequence of receiving payment during leave. Employers tended to be more positive towards men taking leave than earlier and generally were positive towards the fund. Around one third of employers were unaware of the possibility to receive reimbursement for 29 weeks – even in female dominated sectors - and therefore failed to claim such reimbursement. This was clearly related to whether or not employers paid wages during leave for their employees (COWI, 2010).

b. Paternity leave (Fædreorlov: see ‘note on terminology’) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave

- Two weeks, to be taken during the first 14 weeks after birth.

Payment and funding

- Payment and funding as for Maternity leave.

Eligibility

- Anyone in a recognised partnership, including same-sex partnerships.

Additional note (e.g. if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone)

- All male employees covered by collective agreements receive full earnings during the Paternity leave. Thus, in a survey from 2006, 85 per cent of the fathers reported receiving full earnings during Paternity leave (Olsen, 2007).

c. Parental leave (Forældreorlov: see ‘note on terminology’) (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave

- Thirty-two weeks, until the child is 48 weeks. This is an individual entitlement; however, although each parent can take 32 weeks of leave, each family can only claim 32 weeks of paid leave.

Payment and funding

- Payment and funding as for Maternity leave.

Flexibility in use

- Between eight and 13 weeks can be taken later; any further period must be agreed with the employer. This entitlement is per family.

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• Parents can prolong the 32 weeks leave to 40 weeks (for all) or 46 weeks (only employees). The benefit level is reduced over the extended leave period, so that the total benefit paid equals 32 weeks at the full rate of benefit.
• It is possible to return to work on a part-time basis, with a reduced benefit payment spread over this extended period of leave (e.g. a parent may work half-time and thus prolong the leave period from 32 to 64 weeks.) This is subject to agreement with the employer.

Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)
• As Maternity leave.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent)
• None.

Additional note (e.g. if leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone)
• All employees covered by collective agreements receive full earnings during part or all of the Parental leave period; see 1a additional note. From 2007, the industrial sector (representing 7,000 employers nationwide including production, service, knowledge and IT) has introduced a paid father’s quota in Parental leave. The entitlement is up to nine weeks Parental leave with payment. Three weeks of this Parental leave with pay is for the father, three weeks for the mother and three weeks for the parents to share - the weeks for the mother and the father respectively were quotas and therefore lost if not used. Later agreements have prolonged the period to 4+4+3 weeks.
• As part of the labour market negotiations in Spring 2008, a similar Parental leave model was also introduced for employees working in the public sector. If both parents work in the state sector they are now entitled to leave with full payment for 6+6+6 weeks after Maternity leave, in all 14 weeks of Maternity leave and 18 weeks of Parental leave, all with full payment, a total of 32 weeks. Six weeks is earmarked for the mother, six weeks for the father and six weeks can be shared. As presented in the section on take-up of leave, this earmarked leave for fathers seems to have resulted in a significant higher take-up among fathers working in the municipal sector.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

• For adoptive parents the same regulations for Parental leave apply as for other parents, with the exception that two of the 48 weeks must be taken by both parents together.

Time off for the care of dependants

a. One day to care for a sick child, two days for public employees, for every time a child is ill. Leave is paid.
b. All employees are eligible for a care benefit (*Plejevederlag*) if they care for a terminally ill relative or close friend at home.

*Flexible working*

- None

### 2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave available in Denmark is 14 months, if parents take the option of a longer Parental leave period with a lower benefit payment; leave at 100 per cent of earnings subject to a ceiling lasts for 11 months.

There is an entitlement to ECEC from 6 months of age, so there is no gap between leave and ECEC entitlements. Levels of attendance at formal services for children under 3 years are well above the average for the countries included in this review and for OECD countries; and above average for children over 3. For actual attendance levels, see ‘relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements’ on cross-country comparisons page.

### 3. Changes in policy since April 2012 (including proposals currently under discussion)

The government consisting of Social Democrats, the Social Liberal Party (De Radikale) and the Socialist People’s Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti) that came to power in October 2011 had originally intended to introduce a three months father’s quota, inspired by the other Nordic countries (Ministeriet for Ligestilling og Kirke, 2012). However, no proposals to introduce this quota have, as yet, been put forward.

The government set up a committee in January 2013 to look at the possibilities for increasing fathers’ use of Parental leave. The committee is to look into the experiences from other Nordic countries as it is believed that a father’s quota may make more fathers take up leave. Any policy recommendations must not result in increased expenditure for the state or employers, and the committee must also consider the related consequences for single parents and same-sex parents. The committee report is due in summer 2013, after which the government will decide whether or not to introduce a father’s quota in Denmark. The committee consists of labour market partners and organisations.

### 4. Take-up of leave

#### a. Maternity leave

The present statistics on leave take-up do not provide data on the proportion of mothers using Maternity leave. However, in a survey conducted in 2006 among parents of children born in 2005, 99 per cent of mothers had taken Maternity leave.

In the same survey, nearly all mothers reported that they experienced no negative reaction from the employer when taking leave; 95 per cent reported that they experienced no problems with the workplace when they wanted to take leave. A few mothers reported that

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they were made redundant or experienced bullying from colleagues, and several mentioned that the employer found it difficult to find a replacement (Olsen, 2007). However, recent newspaper reports citing the major trade unions refer to an increase since the financial crisis in the number of women being made redundant during Maternity and Parental leave. Most of these cases end in a settlement where the woman is offered compensation, often six to nine months earnings.

### b. Paternity leave

Statistics on fathers’ take-up of Paternity leave are equally limited. The most recent statistics from 2009 show that 61 per cent of Danish fathers take the two weeks Paternity leave they are entitled to (Danmarks statistik, 2012⁶).

### c. Parental leave

Statistics on the share of fathers and mothers who take-up Parental leave is also not available; however recent statistics from 2010 and 2011 show that Danish fathers on average only take 7.2 per cent of the Parental leave period (Danmarks Statistik, 2013⁷), considerably lower than in e.g. Sweden and Norway⁸.

The 2006 survey data showed that among parents of children born in 2005, 24 per cent of fathers took Parental leave and 94 per cent of mothers. Of these, on average, mothers took 28 weeks of leave, and fathers eight weeks. Twenty-three per cent of fathers started their leave before the Maternity leave expired, i.e. these parents were on leave at the same time. Two-thirds (68 per cent) of two parent families took all the 32 weeks of Parental leave to which they were entitled. Among single parents, 73 per cent took 32 weeks; as Olsen notes, this is interesting because single parents in the Nordic countries tend to take shorter leave periods, often due to the loss of income (Olsen, 2007).

Among the men, public employees accounted for two-thirds (67 per cent) of Parental leave-takers even though they only make up 48 per cent of those entitled to Parental leave. This may be because they receive full earnings during leave or because they are working in more gender-mixed workplaces; some men in the private sector only receive full earnings for part of the Parental leave period. Among those men who do not take leave, 88 per cent were employed in the private sector and this suggests that they have more difficulties taking leave and/or poorer rights.

The take-up of leave seems in the survey related to the educational level of both men and women. In those families where the woman takes the greatest part of the leave, the mother tends to have a low educational level and the father is unskilled, or the reverse; in these families, women typically take 99 per cent of total Parental leave weeks. Self-employed workers, both men and women, tend in general to take fewer weeks of leave.

This is confirmed in register data from Statistics Denmark, looking into couples who became parents in 2006. The higher the educational level of the father, the more Parental leave he takes; engineers, lawyers and teachers on average take 42 days of Parental leave, whereas

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occupational groups such as office clerks, employees in the service sector, and agricultural and horticulture workers on average use only 24 days. Fathers with middle educational level – such as IT workers, chemists, photographers, nurses and police officers – take on average 29 days (Danmarks statistik, 2008⁹). Recent statistics show that fathers in management positions are the fathers taking most leave (Statistics Denmark, 2012).

The 2006 survey suggests that along with educational level, wages, workplace culture and age also seem to be important factors when men and women negotiate who should take Parental leave and these seem to be common factors for both the public and private sectors. Moreover according to the survey, there seems to be agreement on the division of leave between men and women; 98 per cent of women and 98 per cent of men stated that they and their partner agreed on how to divide the leave period. They also seem to agree on what is important to consider when dividing leave between parents; among the considerations that affect the division of leave weeks, couples mentioned: their work/educational situation (men 45 per cent, women 30 per cent), their finances (39/28 per cent), the child (32/25 per cent), desire to reconcile work and family life (28/27 per cent), equality between parents (22/8 per cent), and day care of the child (11/5 per cent) (Olsen, 2007). Other studies, however, show that often the parents do not in reality negotiate the division of Parental leave; instead leave is often perceived as ‘for women’ and thus automatically divided according to cultural assumptions of gender and parenthood (Bloksgaard 2009¹⁰, 2011¹¹).

Traditional male work cultures at the workplace seem to play a role. A recent survey conducted among the population in general showed that more than 50 per cent of the fathers who took less than three month leave in total (Paternity and/or Parental leave) mention ‘if my employer had clearly indicated that my job situation would not be negatively affected’ and ‘if my work place had a tradition for male employees taking leave’ as factors that may have made them take longer leave (DJØF 2011¹²). This indicates that Danish fathers’ limited leave take-up may be explained by a fear of leave having negative consequences or not being seen as ‘appropriate’ for men in work life.

The possibility for flexibility in taking part-time leave or postponing leave may be attractive, especially for fathers. The 2006 survey found that 36 per cent of women on leave and 6 per cent of men on leave made use of some form of flexibility in the leave law: 21 per cent of women and 4 per cent of men postponed periods of leave to be taken later, 12 per cent of women and 3.5 per cent of men extended their leave periods by 8 or 14 weeks (often because of lack of day care), and 4 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women took up part-time work with or without an extension of the leave period (Olsen, 2007).

The survey also revealed that 27 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women reported a lack of information on leave rights. This is supported by other studies, which conclude that the fact that leave entitlements are given by several different levels (law, collective agreements

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and company level) is blurring parents' insights into what they are entitled to (Bloksgaard 2009, 2011, 2014\textsuperscript{13}).

Thirty seven per cent of men and 23 per cent of women in the survey from 2006 were in favour of the re-introduction of quotas in Parental leave. Olsen interprets this lower support among women as related to the fact that a father’s quota would require women to give up a number of weeks currently available to them. The higher support among fathers is related to a wish for more back-up when they discuss leave-taking with their employer or with colleagues (Olsen, 2007). That role models and support from colleagues and superiors are important for Danish fathers’ leave take-up is supported by another survey (DJØF 2011).

**d. Leave take-up in total**

In addition to the (relatively) limited statistics referred to above, the available statistics presenting the present leave situation look across the entire leave period (Maternity, Paternity and Parental leave) and the data are presented here.

This data is based on how many parents receive the cash benefit during leave. Data for the period 2010-2011\textsuperscript{14} show a small drop in the number of days that fathers take when both the mother and father take up leave, from 38 days on average in 2010 to 36 days in 2011. Mothers on the other hand increased their average number of leave days from 292 days in 2010 to 295 days in 2011, i.e. in the families where both parents took up leave, the share of leave taken by mothers increased slightly.

On the other hand, taking the perspective of the child, an increasing proportion of children experience both father and mother taking leave, 56 per cent in 2011 compared with 49 per cent in 2010; 25 per cent of children in 2011 experienced only the mother taking leave, 311 days on average. For 8 per cent of children only the father took leave, 36 days on average.

Finally, 11 per cent of children had parents who had no entitlement to receive the cash benefit (Danmarks statistik, 2013\textsuperscript{15}).

The recent information on leave use also shows a general decline in leave take-up from 2009 to 2010 among Danish fathers, regardless of whether they were unskilled, skilled or professionals, but it seems to affect fathers especially in the private sector (Ugebrevet A4 2013\textsuperscript{16}). This may indicate that the economic crisis has a negative impact on these fathers’ leave use – the risk of being fired may prevent fathers from negotiating leave at their workplace and for fathers working in the private sector in particular. On the other hand, significantly more fathers working in municipalities within the public sector have taking leave, which most likely is related to the introduction of the six weeks father’s quota in 2008 (Momentum, 2012\textsuperscript{17}).


\textsuperscript{17} Momentum (2012) Kommunalt ansatte mænd er blevet vilde med barsel. Available at: http://www.kl.dk/Momentum/momentum2012-8-2-id110277/
5. Research and publications on leave and other employment-related policies since April 2012

a. General overview

Although there are quite extensive statistics on the use of leave, Danish research into the take-up of leave and the reconciliation of work and family life is only limited.

b. Selected publications since April 2012


This report investigates international evidence on the effects of parental leave and fathers’ leave take-up, looking into policies in Canada, Portugal and Germany.


As leave entitlement in Denmark is offered in legislation (parental leave is sharable with the partner), collective agreements and at company level. This means that Danish fathers must individually negotiate leave with the mother and at the work place. This chapter explores Danish fathers’ negotiations of leave – and male identity/practices – at the work place.


The chapter looks into the political processes behind the development of Nordic childcare policy, including parental leave.


In this chapter of the report, the Nordic childcare policies are characterized and compared with other European countries.


This chapter investigates the changes in family policies in the last decades and their consequences across a number of Nordic countries.

c. Ongoing research

Research on Parental leave is conducted at Aalborg University as part of the PLEG (Parental Leave, Equality and Gender) project. The focus of the project is leave for parents in the Nordic countries and the study of politics, policies and practices. Contact: Anette Borchorst (ab@dps.aau.dk), Tine Rostgaard (tr@dps.aau.dk) and Lotte Bloksgaard (bloksgaard@cgs.aau.dk)
A review of existing Danish and Nordic literature regarding father’s quotas is presently being conducted at SFI, The Danish National Centre for Social Research as background for the commission mentioned in section 3. Contact: Helle Holt at hh@sfi.dk.

‘Nordic fatherhoods’ is a book project supported financially by REASSESS and NOS-HS. The book focusses on the policies, practices and discourses on fatherhood in the Nordic countries, with contributions from a number of members of the international leave network and edited by G. Eydal and T. Rostgaard. The book will be published by Policy Press in 2014.