

Denmark¹⁷⁵

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For comparisons with other countries in this review on leave provision and early childhood education and care services, please see the [cross-country tables](#) at the front of the review (also available individually on the [Leave Network website](#)). To contact authors of country notes, see the [members page](#) on the Leave Network website.

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

Note on terminology. With the implementation of the EU Directive 2019/1158 from August 2022, the term *Leave* is commonly used in the general guidelines. For the sake of clarity, the following terms are applied in the report: *Graviditetsorlov* (Pregnancy leave) is the leave to be taken by the mother before birth; *Barselsorlov* (Maternity leave) the leave reserved for the mother after birth; *Fædre/moderorlov* (Paternity/co-mother leave) the leave reserved for the father or same-sex co-mother after birth; and *Forældreorlov* (Parental leave) the leave available for both parents after birth.

Note on total leave period.

The Danish system distinguishes between leave entitlements (time off work) and benefit entitlements (weeks with payment). These do not correspond one-to-one. While each parent has the right to 24 weeks of leave after birth, benefit entitlement consists of 32 weeks of parental leave benefits per family (transferable between parents) and 11 weeks of non-transferable benefit entitlement for each parent (i.e. 32+11+11 weeks), but with some overlap.

As a result, not all leave weeks are necessarily paid, and the number of weeks with full benefit depends on how parents allocate the shared benefit period. The maximum leave period with benefit is normally 48 weeks per family.

The full leave period with benefits is composed as follows (see Figure 1):

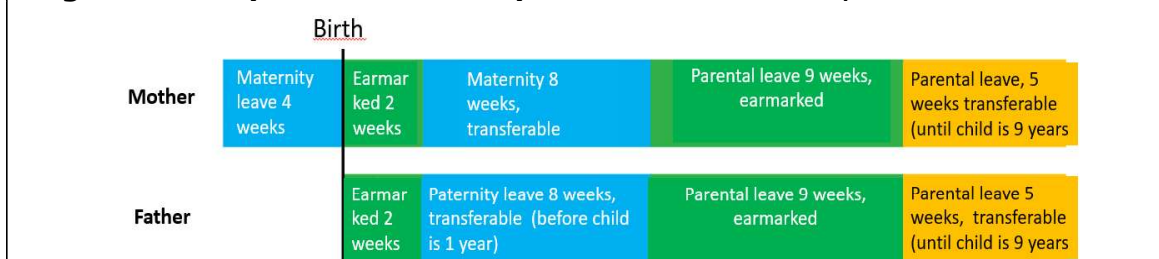
- 2 weeks non-transferable leave after birth for each parent (Maternity and Paternity/co-mother leave) and a further 9 weeks of non-transferable, leave for each parent (Parental leave). This means that in total there are 11 weeks of

¹⁷⁵ Please cite as: Diop-Christensen, A. and Rostgaard, T. (2026) 'Denmark country note', in Dobrotić, I., Arnalds, A., Kaufman, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P. and Valentova, M. (Eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2026*. Available at: <https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/>

non-transferable leave with benefits for each parent after birth (marked with green in the figure).

- 13 weeks transferable leave for each parent (for the mother eight weeks Maternity and five weeks Parental leave, and for the father 8 weeks of Paternity and five weeks of Parental leave)
- In addition, there are 4 weeks non-transferable, earmarked leave with benefits prior to the birth for the mother (Pregnancy leave).

Figure 1. Composition of leave periods with benefits, mother and father



a. Pregnancy and Maternity leave (*Graviditets og fødselsorlov*: see 'note on terminology') (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave with benefits (before and after birth)

- 14 weeks: 4 weeks before birth and 10 weeks after the birth (see Figure 1).
- It is obligatory to take the first 2 weeks after birth.

Payment, funding and taxation

- All employees and self-employed persons are entitled to a daily cash benefit based on former earnings, up to an upper limit of DKK5,085 [€680.21]¹⁷⁶ per week for full-time employees, before tax.¹⁷⁷ This is the same amount paid for unemployment and sickness benefit.
- Payments are taxed, typically between 38 to 41 per cent.
- The Danish pension system is based on three pillars: (i) a universal and tax-based public pension scheme; (ii) occupational pensions which may be quasi-mandatory given the collective agreements; and (iii) private pension savings. The public pension is not affected by taking leave. If full earnings are paid, pension payments to the occupational pension scheme are not affected by taking leave either. If leave is awarded without full pay, occupational pensions are normally affected since payments from the employer and employee are discontinued. The collective agreement may, however, specify that the employer must continue payments. Special conditions apply for employees working in the state and municipalities where the employer must continue payments to the occupational pensions. Payments to the private pension scheme are entirely covered by the employee who may/may not decide to continue payments.

¹⁷⁶ Conversion of currency undertaken for 20 July 2026, using: <https://data.ecb.europa.eu/currency-converter>.

¹⁷⁷ <https://www.borger.dk/arbejde-dagpenge-ferie/Dagpenge-kontanthjaelp-og-sygedagpenge/sygedagpenge/sygedagpenge-hvis-du-er-ledig>

- Funded by the state from general taxation, except for first eight weeks when municipalities bear half of the cost, and is paid out by the public agency, *Udbetaling Danmark*.

Flexibility in use

- None.

Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)

- Eligibility for full compensation for an employee is based on a period of work of at least 160 hours in the four months preceding the paid leave, i.e., regardless of the partner's labour market situation. Workers must also have worked at least 40 hours per month in 3 of those 4 months, and they must be working up to the first day of the leave. Workers with temporary contracts are excluded only if they are not eligible for unemployment benefit.
- Eligibility for the cash benefit for the self-employed (including helping a spouse) is based on at least part-time professional activity for at least 6 months within the last 12-month period, of which one month immediately precedes the paid leave. Likewise, the company must produce a profit. Eligibility also requires that the person is caring for the child on a daily basis. If the individual has recently started their company and has been self-employed less than 6 months, they can count regular paid work (not including various forms of public benefits) as work.
- People 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, are eligible for the cash benefit.
- Unemployed people are entitled to cash benefits from unemployment insurance or similar benefits (activation measures).
- Mothers who have a child while studying are entitled to a total of up to 12 months' extra study grant, with the understanding that the 14 weeks of Maternity leave are covered via the study grant. Male students are entitled up to six months extra study grant.
- People on sickness benefits continue to receive these payments 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

- If the mother is employed and returns to full-time work, there is the right to transfer up to 8 weeks of leave to the father or co-parent, if they were co-residing at birth. The weeks of leave must be taken within 1 year.
- In the case of illness or death, the 2 weeks of compulsory leave can be transferred to the father or co-parent.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None

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

- Leave is not only regulated via national legislation, but also via collective agreements in the labour market and agreements at company level. In 2018, 82 per cent of the total workforce was covered by such collective agreements (compared to 74 per cent in the private sector).¹⁷⁸ These workers receive compensation during leave from their employer, up to the value of their former earnings, i.e., their employer supplements the state benefit.
- A number of collective agreements and work contracts have the requirement that the employee must have been employed in the company for a certain period, for instance 18 months. This positions young women poorly in regard to their right to full pay but also for taking up work elsewhere.¹⁷⁹
- To help employers finance the costs regarding compensation up to the workers' former earnings (see above), different leave reimbursement funds have been set up.
- Employees in municipalities and regions are entitled to eight weeks before birth and employees working in the state sector six weeks prior to birth.

a) Paternity/co-mother leave (*Fædre/medmoderorlov*: see 'note on terminology') (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave

- 10 weeks.

Payment, funding and taxation

- Payment and funding are the same as for Maternity leave, including pension payments.

Flexibility in use

- The first 2 weeks must be taken immediately after the birth, but the remaining period can be taken within the 1st year.
- Up to 8 weeks of leave can be transferred to the mother or co-parent, if they were co-residing at birth.

Eligibility

- Employees and self-employed people in a recognized partnership, including same-sex partnerships. The parental status must have been established. The provisions are the same as for Maternity leave.
- Children born into a female same-sex family can be adopted by the co-mother as a stepchild. This means that an adoptive mother who is the registered partner or spouse of a female biological mother is also entitled to the Paternity (and Parental) leave cash benefit. Male same-sex couples who

¹⁷⁸ DA Analyse (2020) *I Danmark er de fleste dækket af overenskomst* [Most are covered by collective agreements in Denmark]. Available at: <https://www.da.dk/politik-og-analyser/overenskomst-og-arbejdsret/2018/hoej-overenskomstdaekning-i-danmark/>.

¹⁷⁹ Politiken, 3 March 2023: *Vil virksomheder helst undgå unge kvinder med planer om at blive mødre?*

have conceived children via a surrogate mother do not have the same possibilities.

- Unemployed fathers receive unemployment benefit and people on sickness benefits receive sick benefit in the two weeks of Paternity leave.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- None

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. However, as stated earlier (see 1a additional note), the percentage of the Danish workforce covered by collective agreements is declining, especially among the younger age groups.

b) Parental leave (*Forældreorlov*: see 'note on terminology') (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour)

Length of leave

- 32 weeks per parent.
- Leave is an individual entitlement, part of which is transferable (see 'Payment, funding and taxation').

Payment, funding and taxation

- Each parent is eligible for 14 weeks of Parental leave benefit, 5 weeks of which is transferable to the other parent. Payment and funding are the same as for Maternity leave, including pension payments

Flexibility in use

- Subject to agreement with the employer, 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 part-time and thus prolong the leave period from 32 to 64 weeks).
- The 14 weeks of paid leave must be taken within 1 year after the birth of the child. A further 5 weeks of the 32 week leave can be postponed but must be taken as one continuous period before the child turns 9 years. Additional weeks can be postponed with the agreement of the employer, and that too must be used before the child turns age 9 years.
- If leave is transferred, the employer must agree to postpone this period until after the child is 1 year old.
- Both parents can be on leave at the same time. Simultaneous leave-taking may reduce the total duration of leave with full benefits available to the family.
- Each parent can prolong their 32 weeks' leave to 40 weeks (for all) or 46 weeks (only employed and self-employed people). In this case, the benefit level is reduced over the extended leave period.

Eligibility (e.g., related to employment or family circumstances)

- As for Maternity leave.
- Fathers who are studying receive a total of up to nine months' extra study grant.
- Same-sex parenting couples have the same eligibility as described above in 1b.

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)

- Parents who have 2 or more children from the same birth or adoption are entitled to 26 additional weeks of Parental leave with parental benefits. These extra weeks are divided equally: 13 weeks for each parent, to be taken within the child's first year of life. This leave is non-transferable between the parents but can be transferred to a social parent. Solo parents are entitled to 13 extra weeks of leave, and can apply for an additional 13 weeks, which can be transferred to a close family member or a social parent.
- In the case that the mother and father/co-mother do not cohabitate at the time of birth, do not have shared custody, or if the child only has one judicial parent at the time of birth (if the child is conceived by donor or the other parent has passed away), the single parent has a right to 46 weeks of leave after birth. Single parents can transfer up to 13 weeks of leave to near family members.
- LGBT+ families can transfer leave to so-called social parents (non-biological co-parents), so they can share leave between all parents, e.g., two legal parents and two so-called social parents.
- Social parents are defined as: the spouse of a legal parent, the cohabiting partner of a legal parent if they have lived together for a minimum of two years, a known donor with a parental relation to the child, or the spouse/cohabiting partner of the known donor if this person has a parental relation to the child. The legal parents can each transfer up to 13 weeks of leave to a social parent.

Regional or local variations in leave policy

- 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 the Parental leave period (a maximum coverage may be set in the agreements, however); see above in 1a additional note.
- See 1a regarding the reimbursement fund for the self-employed.
- From 2007, the industrial sector (representing 7,000 employers nationwide, including production, service, knowledge, and IT, and encompassing more than 500,000 employees) introduced a paid father's quota in Parental leave. The entitlement was up to 9 weeks' Parental leave with payment, 3 weeks with pay for the father, 3 weeks for the mother, and 3 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 first 4+4+3 weeks (in 2014)¹⁸⁰, to 5+5+3 weeks (in 2017) and from 2020, 8+5+3, i.e., the father has now the right to half of the earmarked weeks.¹⁸¹
¹⁸² Parents covered by this agreement can take Parental leave with pay within a year after the birth of the child.

d. Childcare leave or career breaks

No statutory entitlement.

e. Other types of leave and flexible working

Adoption leave and pay

- For adoptive parents, the same regulations for Parental leave apply as for other parents, with the exception that there is a right to take two of the 48 weeks by both parents together.

Time off for the care of dependents

- No statutory entitlement. Most working contracts and labour market agreements include the right to take one day of paid leave per episode of illness to care for a sick child.
- Following the 2026 collective bargaining round in the public sector (state, regional and municipal levels), provisions have been expanded to include additional rights for caring for sick children, including for example a “third sick-child day” and adjustments to care-day rules. These rights depend on the applicable collective agreement and are not statutory.

Specific provision for (breast)feeding

- None.

Flexible working for carers

- Parents with 1 or more children under 9 years old may apply in writing for changes in work hours, or work patterns in a specific period of time. Flexible work may include distance working, working from home, or a reduction in work hours. If the application is denied, the employer must say why. The right against dismissal, which is in place during leave, also encompasses when the employee applies for changes in the work arrangement.

Time off for antenatal appointments and care

- Workers can take paid leave for antenatal appointments.

¹⁸⁰ <http://kooperationen.dk/media/69502/CO-Industriens-Overenskomst-2014-2017.pdf>

¹⁸¹ CO Industri & DI (2017) Industriens Overenskomst 2017-2020. <https://di.dk/Shop/Overenskomster/Produktside/Pages/Produktside.aspx?productId=6549>

¹⁸² CO Industri & DI (2020) Industriens Overenskomst 2020-2023, <https://www.danskindustri.dk/vi-radgiver-dig-ny/di-dokumenter-for-personale/personalejuras-dokumenter/overenskomster/industriens-overenskomst/>

Other provisions of leave

- **Bereavement leave.** This is available to a parent whose child is stillborn or dies before reaching the age of 18 years. The parent may receive up to 26 weeks of bereavement leave with Maternity/Parental leave benefits, subject to the applicable eligibility conditions. The leave begins the day after the child's death and can be taken flexibly

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

The duration of leave with full benefit depends on how the shared Parental leave benefits are allocated between the parents. In practice, most families can cover approximately ten–11 months with benefits at the standard rate, though this varies.

There is an entitlement to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from when the child is six months of age, so there is no gap between the end of well-paid leave and an ECEC entitlement.

For ECEC attendance levels, see 'relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements' on [cross-country comparisons](#) page.

3. Changes in policy since April 2025 (including proposals currently under discussion)

A new law improving Parental leave rights for parents of hospitalized newborns entered into force on 1 January 2026. Under the new rules, parents may extend their Parental leave with benefits for up to 12 months in cases where the child is hospitalized or receives equivalent treatment at home. This represents a substantial extension compared to the previous maximum period. In addition, eligibility for bereavement leave benefits was expanded from July 2025, extending access to benefits for parents in cases of child loss.

The 2026 public sector agreements introduced improvements in paid leave for caring for sick children (e.g. additional sick-child days).

4. Uptake of leave

Statistics on the uptake of leave do not provide data on the proportion of parents using either Maternity, Paternity or Parental leave; instead uptake is grouped across the three forms of leave. Most statistical accounts use data on parents who are entitled only, and the following presentation will focus on parents in couples who are entitled for the cash benefits. This section refers to the latest available figures, which are from April 2024. These show that the EU Work-Life Balance Directive has had a clear effect on leave take up and that the trajectory it initiated continues in the same direction, albeit far less marked than when the reform was first introduced, with fathers still gradually increasing their share of leave.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ [NYT: Fædre holder længere barselsorlov - Danmarks Statistik](#)

a. Mothers on leave

Focusing on cohabiting couples where both parents were entitled for the cash benefits, in 2024, 99 per cent of entitled mothers took leave (based on data for cohabiting parents with children born between 2 August and 31 December). This is the same proportion for mothers as in 2023 and the year before the Directive.¹⁸⁴

Though the Directive did not change whether mothers take leave or not, it reduced the number of leave days with an overall decrease of approximately 40 days from 2020 to 2024. Concretely, mothers of children born in 2020 took on average around 280 days of leave following birth, compared with approximately 240 days for the 2024 cohort. The majority of this decline occurred in the period following the introduction of the EU Directive, particularly between 2021 and 2023, when the reduction amounted to around 36 days. Nevertheless, a further slight decrease is also observed between the 2023 and 2024 cohorts, at just under two days.¹⁸⁵

b. Fathers on leave

The effect of the Directive for fathers is evident both in the proportion of fathers taking leave and in their total leave period. The share of fathers entitled to leave benefits who actually take leave increased by one percentage point since 2023, reaching 93 per cent for the 2024 cohort. This is based on data for cohabiting parents with children born between 2 August and 31 December in 2023 compared with the same period in 2024. Prior to the leave reform introduced on 2 August 2022, the proportion of fathers taking leave had remained relatively stable at around 83 per cent.¹⁸⁶

While mothers' total leave days have decreased by about 40 days with the implementation of the EU Directive (between 2020 and 2024), fathers' days of leave have increased by approximately the same number. Fathers of children born in 2020 took on average about 37 days of leave, increasing to 39 days for the 2021 cohort. In 2023, the first full year after the reform, this figure rose substantially to about 71 days. This upward trend continued into the most recent data, with fathers of children born in 2024 taking an average of 77 days of leave.¹⁸⁷

The decline in leave taken by mothers, alongside an increase in leave taken by fathers, has resulted in an overall reduction of nine leave days per family in recent years (2020–2024). Children born in 2020 spent an average of 302 days in their first year of life with at least one parent present. For children born in 2023, this figure decreased to 291 days. However, between 2023 and 2024, there was a slight increase of approximately two days, bringing the total to 293 days. These figures apply to cohabiting parents in which both are entitled to leave benefits.¹⁸⁸

Despite the implementation of the EU Directive in 2022, the statistics show that it is still primarily mothers who care for the youngest children. Among cohabiting parents who both took leave, most mothers who had a child in the last five months

¹⁸⁴ Based on authors own calculations from StatBank Denmark:
<https://www.statistikbanken.dk/barlov1>

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/nyt/GetPdf.aspx?cid=53889>

¹⁸⁶ Based on authors own calculations from StatBank Denmark:
<https://www.statistikbanken.dk/barlov1>

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/nyt/GetPdf.aspx?cid=53889>

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/nyt/GetPdf.aspx?cid=53889>

of 2024 combined their own earmarked leave, their non-earmarked leave, as well as the father's non-earmarked leave within the child's first 36 weeks. The women who finish their leave earliest do so around week 26, after which the number of mothers on leave gradually declines until week 37, by which point the mother has used up most of the leave she is entitled to with benefits. Only then, around 37 weeks after the child's birth, do fathers in larger numbers begin to take their earmarked leave. This pattern is the same as for parents of children born in the corresponding months of 2023. Prior to the implementation of the EU Directive (for the 2021 cohort) the transition from the mother taking leave to the father was more gradual with quite many mothers still being on leave in weeks 38-46.¹⁸⁹

There may be a number of other reasons why fathers do not take leave or take less than they are entitled to. A representative survey conducted among 2,500 men who became fathers after the reform of the parental leave showed that 24 per cent took less than the 11 weeks.¹⁹⁰ The study was conducted in August 2023, and thus one year after the reform. It revealed a mix of economic and attitudinal reasons preventing the fathers from taking leave, but also that the partner has superior leave rights and a job situation that was more accommodated taking up leave. The main reason was financial concerns (50 per cent), that the mother wanted to take leave (26 per cent), having insufficient leave rights (22 per cent), the work situation did not allow it (22 per cent), the child needs a mother (for instance breastfeeding) (22 per cent), would negatively affect my career (11 per cent), the mothers leave rights are superior to mine (10 per cent), the mother is best fit to care for the child (nine per cent), the child is better off with its mother (9 per cent), other (17 per cent).

Yet the reform had a clear impact on gender equality. Recent evidence from the Ministry of Employment further supports the trends identified in this report. According to Status of the Labour Market (October 2024), the fact that mothers return to work earlier contributes to a reduction in the gender pay gap between parents by approximately DKK23,000 [€3,076.68] within the child's first year. The reform is also associated with long-term financial gains for mothers, including higher pension savings. Importantly, these changes are observed broadly across sectors, industries, and municipalities, indicating that the policy has had a widespread and structural impact on both gender equality and labour market outcomes.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Based on authors own calculations from StatBank Denmark:
<https://www.statistikbanken.dk/barlov2>

¹⁹⁰ https://moedrehjaelpen.dk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MoedrehjaelpenTema_14Januar_2024_De-nye-barselsreglers-indflydelse-paa-familielivet16.01.24.pdf

¹⁹¹ https://www.bm.dk/nyheder/pressemeddelelser/2024/10/oeremaerket-orlov-mindsker-loenforskellen-mellem-foraeldre?utm_source=chatgpt.com