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Extract from Rigsrevisionen's report on
**services provided to children
in care**

submitted to the Public Accounts Committee



1849
147.281
237
1976
114.6
22.480
908

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1. Introduction and conclusion

1.1. PURPOSE AND CONCLUSION

1. This report concerns the extent to which the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior supports the municipalities in their efforts towards children in care. In 2014, approximately 11,000 children – corresponding to 1 per cent of all Danish children – aged between 0 and 17 were placed away from their home, either with foster families or in institutions. In 2014, the municipalities' expenditure for placements was DKK 9.3 billion, of which the government funded approximately DKK 600 million.

2. In the past ten years, municipalities have, on occasion, failed to supervise children in care adequately or failed to take appropriate and timely action to protect children exposed to abuse or neglect.

3. If children in care do not receive the support and assistance they need, the socioeconomic as well as the personal consequences for the children may be severe; there is evidence that former children in care as adults are less likely to complete an education or find employment than children who have not been placed in care. Moreover, former children in care experience more serious health problems as adults and more are likely to commit criminal offences. It follows that improving the quality of care placements has potential benefits.

4. The Danish parliament implemented the reform of the Danish child protection system in 2006 in order to improve the policy outcome. As part of the reform, the provisions of the Act on Social Services concerning placement of children in care were fundamentally changed. The objective of the reform was to ensure that children in care had the same opportunities as their peers in terms of education, work and family life, and this should be achieved by lifting the quality of case processing in the municipalities. The most serious problems that needed to be addressed were outlined in the comments to the bill:

- Care services were not sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of the individual child.
- The care provided was not adequately followed up.
- The children were not adequately consulted on their future.
- The effect of the care services was neither documented nor measured.

CHILDREN IN CARE

In this study, children in care refers to all children and young people between the ages 0 to 17 placed in care.

THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND THE INTERIOR

Reference to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior includes both the department and underlying agencies like the National Social Appeals Board and the National Board of Social Services.

CHILD PROTECTION EXAMINATION

The purpose of this examination is to identify the children's strengths and the problems they are facing. The examination is described in detail in section 50 of the Act on Social Services. The caseworker assesses the following aspects in relation to the child:

- development and behaviour
- family
- school
- health
- leisure activities and friendships
- other matters of relevance.

With the reform, parliament wanted to improve the quality of care placements for the individual child by requiring the municipalities to adopt a more systematic and thorough approach to placements. To achieve this, the reform imposed statutory requirements on the municipalities to conduct so-called child protection examinations and work out action plans for the children, before they were placed in care. The reform also specified the municipalities' obligation to consult with the children on their future, and prescribed the number of times the local authorities would be required to follow up on the care services provided to the individual child. Last, the reform set out to ensure that the effect of services provided to children in care was documented and measured.

5. Rigsrevisionen initiated the study in November 2015 in order to determine whether the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior has supported the municipalities' efforts towards children in care. The background for the study is the fact that examinations of the municipalities' practice in the area, carried out by the National Social Appeals Board, show that a large number of cases are not processed in compliance with the statutory requirements that were introduced with the reform of the child protection system ten years ago. To this should be added that knowledge of the outcome of placements is limited. In her response of 30 July 2015 to parliament's Committee on Social Affairs and the Interior, Karen Ellemann, Minister of Social Affairs and the Interior, said that the level of knowledge about the effect of the methods and approach employed to support children in care is insufficient.

The purpose of the study is to assess whether the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior has supported the municipalities in their efforts towards children in care in order to achieve the objectives defined for the reform of the child protection system. The report answers the following questions:

- Has the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior supported the municipalities in their efforts to comply with the requirements of the reformed child protection system in terms of meeting the needs of the individual child, consulting with the children on their future and following up on care services provided?
- Has the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior supported achievement of the objectives set for documentation and measuring of the effect of services provided to children in care?

CONCLUSION

Rigsrevisionen's study shows that the reform of the child protection system has not – in the period 2006 to 2014 – diminished the problems it was meant to resolve. The purpose of the reform was to

- tailor care services to the needs of the individual child based on the child-protection examinations and action plans worked out for the individual child;
- follow up on the effect of care provided to the individual child;
- involve the children through consultations;
- document and measure the effect of the services provided to children in care.

It is Rigsrevisionen's assessment that the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior has not supported the municipalities adequately in their efforts to implement the reform of the child protection system. Through examinations carried out in the period 2006 to 2014, the ministry was made aware that a considerable number of placement cases were not processed by the local authorities in compliance with the statutory requirements. This means that child protection examinations and action plans have not been worked out for many of the children placed in care during this period, nor have the authorities consulted with the children prior to their placement. Since 2006, the ministry has implemented a number of legislative and specific initiatives to strengthen and improve practices concerning placements. Specific initiatives to strengthen case processing have included supplementary training of caseworkers. However, examinations carried out by the ministry over the past ten years do not provide any evidence that case processing has improved, nor is the ministry able to document that these initiatives have had the intended effect.

Since 2006, there has been a large gap between key statutory requirements and the practice of the local authorities. An intensified effort is therefore needed to ensure that cases are processed in compliance with the requirements and objectives of the reform of the child protection system.

It is also Rigsrevisionen's assessment that the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior has not adequately supported the municipalities in their efforts to ensure that the effect of services provided to children in care is documented and measured. This assessment is based on the fact that the ministry has only taken few and sporadic steps to disseminate tools that could assist the local authorities and social service providers in documenting and measuring the effect of care services. Rigsrevisionen's study shows that the local authorities have not come very far in measuring the effect of services provided to children in care, and they are therefore unable to incorporate knowledge of the effect of the various services in their management of the area.

Rigsrevisionen's study shows that caseworkers are required to report a large amount of data on placements to the National Social Appeals Board for statistical purposes. Rigsrevisionen finds it important that the ministry ensures that these data are being used. The ministry should also prioritise the key data that are essential for monitoring the effect of services provided to children in care, on national level. On national level, only a few indicators measure outcomes for children in care and the indicators cannot be linked to the type of care that the individual child is placed in, which means that the ministry cannot monitor the effect of the placements.