



Extract from the report to the  
Public Accounts Committee on  
women's shelters

January  
2014

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## I. Introduction and conclusion

1. This report is about the services that the authorities – in accordance with section 109 of the Danish Consolidation Act on Social Services – shall provide to women and children who have been exposed to domestic violence, or otherwise abused by a family member. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Integration is responsible for legislation in the area, whereas the local authorities are responsible for helping the women and children during and after their stay at the shelter.

2. Every year, around 2,000 women contact one of the 42 shelters located across Denmark and ask for temporary accommodation and help. The women have been exposed to domestic violence, threats of violence or other abuse by their spouse or partner. Many of the women bring their children with them to the shelter and the children have generally witnessed the abuse of their mother. Many of the children have been exposed to violence, cf. the annual statistics 2013 published by the Danish National Board of Social Services.

According to section 109 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services, the local authorities shall offer women and their children temporary accommodation at a shelter. Women with children are also entitled to sessions with a family counsellor who will help them rebuild their lives free of domestic violence, and professional psychological therapy must be provided to children staying at shelters to help them overcome their experiences.

3. Rigsrevisionen initiated this examination in February 2013.

4. The purpose of the report is to determine whether women and children receive the help to rebuild their lives free of domestic violence that they are entitled to, according to section 109 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services. The report answers the following questions:

- What are the legislative requirements concerning organisation and funding of women's shelters and the regulatory tasks of the local authorities?
- Do the local authorities ensure that women and children during and after their stay at a shelter receive the support that they are entitled to according to section 109 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services?
- Does the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Integration contribute to ensuring that the local authorities provide the support that the women and children are entitled to according to section 109 of Consolidation Act on Social Services?

5. The report is based also on cases, sampled from eight municipalities, concerning women staying at shelters.

***The Consolidation Act on Social Services***  
*Consolidation Act no 1093 of 5 September 2013 on social services.*

***Responsibility of authorities***  
*The public authorities – in this instance the local authorities – that have a regulatory duty to take action.*

***Family counselling***  
*The local authorities must offer women with children at shelters, support and counselling.*

*The family counsellor is the constant and coordinating person that the family can rely on.*

## MAIN CONCLUSION

Women and children seek help at shelters when they find themselves in a difficult situation where they are being exposed to violence, threats of violence or are otherwise abused. They are vulnerable and often they have neither a network nor the strength to stand up for their rights. Rigsrevisionen is of the opinion that it is of fundamental importance for the women and children that the support provided to them at the shelters is effective and of high quality. A timely effective effort will enable the families to cope on their own sooner, which will reduce the costs imposed on society.

### **Operational supervision**

*The local authorities undertake the general operational supervision of the shelters in accordance with section 148 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services. This means that the local authorities supervise operations, but not the support provided by the shelters.*

Traditionally, shelters attract many volunteers, which is reflected in their organisational set up and the way they operate. The operations of the shelters have so far been supervised by the local authorities, but the local authorities have not had instruments to exert influence on the quality of the support provided at the private/independent shelters. The shelters do not require approval by the local authorities. The support provided and tariffs charged by the shelters vary. These factors indicate that the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Integration needs to assess whether funds are managed effectively in the area and whether the collective effort fulfils the intentions of the Consolidation Act on Social Services.

The local authorities do not have the right to make referrals to the shelters; still it is their responsibility to ensure that the necessary support is provided to the women and children during their stay at the shelter. Rigsrevisionen's examination showed that the local authorities are not always aware that specific women and children were staying at the shelters, and do not adequately ensure that the women are offered the support to which they are legally entitled, i.e. family counselling and psychological therapy for the children. This is not considered satisfactory by Rigsrevisionen.

Rigsrevisionen finds that joint binding guidelines determining when and how the local authorities should be informed of women and children staying at the shelters would help ensure that the municipalities provide the support that they are required to under the Consolidation Act on Social Services. It is also essential that internal procedures, established at local level, facilitate coordination between all relevant administrative units. The reform of social supervision, that took effect in January 2014, includes the shelters and provides a new basis for supervising the area.

Mid 2013, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Integration started evaluating the shelters. The evaluation will be completed in 2015. It does not include the responsibilities of the municipalities and their efforts in the area. Rigsrevisionen therefore recommends that the ministry – despite the on-going evaluation – should, as soon as possible, take initiative to resolve the issues that are highlighted in this report, including securing that women and children receive the support to which they are entitled, according to section 109 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services.