

A new chance for everyone

- the Danish Government's integration plan

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Summary: A new chance for everyone - the Danish Government's integration plan

The Government has the clear goal of improving integration. The fundamental values of society, such as democracy and equality between the sexes, must enjoy general recognition. More immigrants should have a job, the young immigrants and descendants of immigrants should become as well educated and trained as young ethnic Danes, and the ghettoisation problem should be addressed.

It is unacceptable that so many immigrants and descendants of immigrants still live on the edges of society with only slight ties with the labour market and a significantly lower education rate than Danes. It is an entirely untenable situation that a large group of citizens are isolated - often in segregated residential areas too - from the remainder of society. The Government will make a targeted effort to make foreigners an active resource to the Danish society. This is what society needs; and what we owe our new fellow citizens.

The Government's firm and fair immigration policy has created a better balance of immigration. Today, the number of foreigners coming to Denmark to work or study by far exceeds the number of foreigners applying for asylum or family reunification.

Based on the integration plan 'A new chance for everybody', the Government will enhance its current integration efforts through several new initiatives intended to boost education and employment among immigrants and their descendants, counter ghettoisation in vulnerable neighbourhoods and prevent and combat crime.

Even though the Government has taken many initiatives to strengthen integration, unfortunately the figures tell their own tale. Today one in two bilingual pupils are so poor at reading that they lack the basic qualifications for completing upper secondary school or vocational training. Only one in ten immigrants aged 25-64 from non-Western countries have gained professional qualifications in Denmark. More than half of all immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries are not part of the workforce.

Young people must be guaranteed relevant offers of education

In order for the integration efforts to succeed, it is essential that the children and young people are given good schooling and training/education. For this reason the Government will strengthen its efforts to give more young people

from immigrant families training and education to improve their qualifications for employment.

The first efforts should be made already at pre-school age and continue when the children start school. Bilingual children must be offered language stimulation, and their Danish language skills must be tested regularly. They will be offered homework coaches, and the career counselling efforts made in the primary school sector must be strengthened.

When the young people leave school, they must be offered training or education in conformity with their skills and qualifications. For this reason the Government intends to make it possible to enrol in several vocational courses on the basis of practical qualifications, strengthen the existing efforts to find more practical training places, reintroduce apprenticeships and launch a scheme rewarding companies which set up additional practical training places.

On the other hand, young people who have not completed any job-qualifying course or who receive cash assistance need to be trained and get a job. The Government therefore proposes to make it compulsory for young people aged 18-25 who receive cash assistance and whose only problem is unemployment to commence a relevant job-qualifying course. Otherwise their cash assistance payments must be stopped.

Parents must also assume responsibility for their children's education and training. Therefore the Government intends to increase the parents' involvement in their 15-17-year-old children's vocational or professional training. To this end, the family allowance scheme will be adjusted so that only young people of 15-17 years who have started a qualifying course or have a job with an educational perspective will be eligible for the allowance.

More people in employment - everybody must be offered enrolment in an employment-generating scheme

A job is the key to successful integration. The Government therefore intends to make extra efforts to increase immigrants' and descendant' ties with the labour market.

The job opportunities of each individual need to be made much more visible. In particular, the Government intends to focus on the 25,000 or so vacancies

posted each year on Jobnet, the job portal of the public employment service, for which no specific skills are required. Therefore future search results on Jobnet will be grouped into jobs for which no special skills are required (HotJob) and other jobs.

And those local authorities which make a special integration effort are to be rewarded. As an example, the Government intends to adjust the refund rates for cash assistance and starting assistance so that local authorities contributing actively to integration will have a larger proportion of their expenses refunded. Conversely, local authorities who do not provide regular offers of activation and training to recipients of cash assistance will have a smaller proportion of their expenses refunded.

Everybody must be offered enrolment in employment-generating schemes. In future, the local authorities must be obliged to provide offers for all recipients of cash assistance - also people who have passively received maintenance for several years. To assist the local authorities to find jobs for more recipients of cash assistance, the Government will launch the programme 'A new chance for everybody'. This programme is intended to make sure that everybody is given the offers of active involvement that he or she needs. Accordingly, the local authorities will tackle the recipients of cash assistance who have not received any offers of active involvement for a long time.

Moreover, it should pay to work. To many married couples who receive cash assistance, it does not pay to take a job. As a financial incentive to make married couples who both receive cash assistance take a job, the Government suggests that where both spouses receive cash assistance, the cash assistance to one of the spouses should be replaced by a lower spousal allowance if that spouse has not had ordinary paid work for 300 hours in the preceding two-year period.

Neighbourhood ghettoisation must be countered

Neighbourhood ghettoisation is a significant barrier to integration into social life, the educational system and the labour market. Therefore the Government intends to continue and enhance its efforts to counter ghettoisation of vulnerable neighbourhoods.

An essential element of the action against ghettoisation is to make neighbourhoods up-to-date and attractive - both in order to retain resourceful residents and to attract a wider group of new residents. To regenerate the vulnerable neighbourhoods, the Government will allocate financial resources for continued renovation of these neighbourhoods. In connection with the regeneration of an entire neighbourhood, it might be necessary to approve demolition to a very limited extent.

To obtain a more balanced composition of residents in the vulnerable areas, the Government intends to boost the sale of non-profit housing in vulnerable areas and make it possible for local authorities to subsidise the removal expenses of residents with limited resources who wish to leave such neighbourhoods. Moreover, the Government intends to allocate funds to social and preventive initiatives as well as initiatives that will further integration and employment in these neighbourhoods.

Extremism and crime must be prevented and combatted

The Government will increase its efforts to strengthen the democratic values of society and to prevent and combat extremism and crime.

One way of doing this is to introduce a bill according to which it will be deemed an aggravating circumstance for sentencing purposes if an offence is committed against a person who has made lawful statement in a public debate. The Government also intends to introduce rules on suspended expulsion which are to function as a clear warning to criminals that one more step in their criminal career may lead to expulsion.

However, legislation itself does not suffice to prevent crime. The individual family is also responsible for keeping their children out of crime. The Government will strengthen parental responsibility by offering parents who do not support their children's education or follow up if their children commit crime that they can attend programmes intended to teach them to understand and accept their responsibility. If they fail to observe specific orders, it will be possible to reduce their family allowance.

An important step towards better integration

By this integration plan, the Government has taken yet another important step towards better integration. However, it is also essential to emphasise that it

will be a long, tough process to obtain successful integration. For this reason the Government will follow up on the initiatives already launched and make further proposals for furthering the integration of immigrants and their descendants in Denmark.