



First results of the U-turn in Danish migration and integration policies

ESPN Flash Report 2018/51

JON KVIST – EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK

JULY 2018

Recent changes in Danish migration and integration policies have led to a fall in the number of asylum seekers, and to more refugees becoming integrated in the labour market. There have been positive experiences with the much stronger focus on jobs through work-oriented schemes, whereby refugees learn culture, language and skills while working. However, lower minimum income benefits have also led to higher rates of relative poverty.

LEGAL NOTICE

This document has been prepared for the European Commission. However, it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Description

Since September 2015, a number of policy changes have aimed at reducing the number of asylum seekers and improving refugee integration.

Policy changes since January 2016, relating to stricter access to the country, have included controls on its borders with Germany as well as tougher rules on family reunification and easier return of rejected asylum seekers. The border controls have been extended several times, most recently from May to November 2018. Together with EU initiatives and similar policy changes in the other Nordic countries, this has led to a marked drop in the number of asylum seekers and in the number of requests for family reunification.

The number of asylum seekers has decreased from 21,316 in 2015 to 6,266 in 2016 and 3,500 in 2017 (Udlændinge- og integrationsministeriet, 2018a). As of 31 May 2018, there were 1,307 asylum seekers so far this year, i.e. 2018 could see the lowest level since 2008. The number of persons seeking family reunification has decreased from 16,017 in 2015 to 8,789 in 2016 and 6,689 in 2017. As of 31 May 2018, 2,463 persons had applied so far this year for family reunification, i.e. one-third of the level in 2013.

Policy changes relating to social security include most notably a new integration

benefit (*integrationsydelse*), introduced in September 2015 and replacing social assistance (at a lower level), for persons who have not been in the country at least seven out of the last eight years. For other persons, a benefit ceiling (*kontanthjælpsloft*) reduces social assistance if total benefits (social assistance plus housing and child allowances) exceed a certain amount, and there is now a new work requirement (*beskæftigelseskrav*): the individual must work at least 225 hours/year in order to remain entitled to the integration benefit or social assistance. The lower income from the integration benefit means that migrant and refugee families with children, in particular, have an income below 50% of the national median income. The benefit ceiling has increased the number of children growing up in income poverty, which also includes Danish and other EU citizens in Denmark: 10,000 children in 2016 (AE, 2018).

Policy changes relating to integration include the Integration Education Benefit (*integrationsuddannelsesydelser*, IGU). The IGU is the flagship policy emerging from negotiations between the government, municipalities and the social partners (see Kvist, 2016). It is a two-year programme whereby the newly arrived refugees and persons reunited with their families are allocated to municipalities in which their qualifications match labour demand, and where they will work at the same time as learning Danish, job-related skills and how to live in Denmark. After a slow start

the scheme has gained momentum, with more participants. From July 2016 to May 2018, a total of 1,495 refugees took part in an IGU scheme (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2018b). There are large differences in the numbers of IGU schemes between municipalities. More than two-thirds of participants are men. More than two-thirds of schemes are in the private sector. More than half of the IGU schemes are concentrated in four branches: public administration (339 schemes), sales (216), transport (172) and manufacturing (169).

There are also traineeships and job subsidy schemes for refugees and migrants. These build on the "old" thinking that the language and skills must first be learned before any offer will be made of a traineeship or subsidised job. Since 1 April 2018, in total 25,896 refugees and family members reunited with refugees have participated in the overall integration programme (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2018b).

Early evaluations indicate that the IGU performs better in getting refugees and migrants into jobs than the old approach (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2018b; KL, 2018).

Outlook & commentary

Undoubtedly, migration and integration will become an important area of debate up to the next parliamentary elections, to be held by 17 June 2019. The opposition, led by the Social Democrats, have declared that they will abolish the benefit ceiling and the work requirement if they win the elections. Otherwise, migration and integration policies are not likely to change markedly, even in case of a change of government.

This is not to say that there will be no adjustments of policies, with regard to effectiveness and equity, nor that these policies are easily implemented and effective on the ground. There are on-going discussions about how to adjust policies to achieve better results (see, for example, the Local Government in Denmark [KL, 2018]).

The success of the work-oriented road to integration depends on companies seeing the placing of refugees and migrants in traineeships and job subsidies not only as part of their corporate social responsibility; they must also see them as a resource in branches with a lack of workforce. More IGU-type schemes are needed.

The municipalities need better information about the qualifications of refugees and migrants, in order to better match them with employers' needs and to better prepare the integration plans.

For refugees and migrants, one notable challenge is how to include more women in work-oriented schemes, in the same way as men. Migrant children have easy access to affordable (mostly free) childcare facilities and to free education.

To reap the economic and social benefits of better integration, the new work-oriented approach to integration could be expanded - from newly arrived refugees and migrants to refugees and migrants generally.

The drop in the number of asylum seekers and those benefiting from family reunification means that more money is available. This could easily be used to help improve and expand the work-oriented approach to integration policies. Financing, however, is likely to remain a political question.

These and other issues will be on the table when the continuation of the IGU scheme beyond 2019 is discussed and negotiated between the government, municipalities and social partners, probably in the winter of 2018-19.

Further reading

AE (2018), "Kontanthjælpsloftet øger antallet af fattige børn i hele landet" [*The benefit ceiling increases the number of poor children*], accessed on 1 July 2018 at:

https://www.ae.dk/sites/www.ae.dk/files/dokumenter/analyse/ae_kontan_thjaelpsloftet-oger-antallet-af-fattige-born-i-hele-landet.pdf.

KL (2018), "Veje til fællesskab. Arbejdsmarkedet som hovedvej til integration" [*Roads to community. The labour market as the main road to integration*], Copenhagen: KL - Local Government Denmark, accessed on 1 July 2018 at: http://kl.dk/ImageVaultFiles/id_86631/cf_202/Veje_til_f_llesskabet_-_2018.PDF.

Kvist, J. (2016), "Recent Danish migration and integration policies", ESPN Flash Report 2016/22.

Udlændinge og integrationsministeriet (2018a), "Tal på udlændigeområdet pr. 31.5.2018" [*Numbers on integration as of 31 May 2018*], Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreigners and Integration, accessed on 1 July 2018 at: <http://uim.dk/filer/indrejse-og-ophold/tal-pa-udlaendingeområdet/2018/tal-paa-udlaendingeområdet-31-maj-2018-revideret-19-juni.pdf>.

Udlændinge og integrationsministeriet (2018b), "Det nationale integrationsbarometer" [*The National Integration Barometer*], Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreigners and Integration, accessed on 1 July 2018 at: <https://integrationsbarometer.dk/>.

Author

[Jon Kvist](#), Roskilde University