

The Integration Paper:

The Contributors

Our New Colleagues

How will Denmark solve the problem of getting jobs for its immigrants? We bring you nine solutions from immigrants who have succeeded in finding a job on their own and have now been able to start contributing to the Danish society. They send a clear message to all immigrants and to the Danes: Do get in touch with each other!

Reason for this Paper

The media is full of bad news about immigrants and refugees:

They have no job.

They cost society billions of Danish kroner.

Some of the young people even commit crimes.

This news is all true.

The media describe reality as it really is - but the media focuses mostly on the problems.

The newspapers, radio and TV seldom waste space or time on presenting solutions to those problems.

However, the daily, *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, does propose solutions in this special edition, which was printed with the financial support of the Ministry of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration.

The background is simple:

In 2003, the Minister of Integration Bertel Haarder (Venstre) declared poor integration on the labour market to be the biggest social problem'. In February 2004, *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* accordingly printed a series of articles about immigrants and refugees who had made it onto the labour market and who might serve as role models to others. The articles created a stir among teachers and politicians. Many of them got in contact with the paper and suggested that the articles were collected in a special edition, which could be used for teaching purposes.

The result is here –*The Contributors* integration paper. 161,000 copies of the paper were printed and distributed to public and private schools and continuation schools as well as to the language centres

where refugees and immigrants take Danish lessons. We hope that the paper will be a welcome contribution to the teaching of social subjects, projects or for project days.

Have a good read!

The Biggest Social Problem

It is not really that difficult to work out the calculation:

If the same percentage of immigrants had jobs compared to the percentage of Danes, the Treasury would have an additional income of DKR 9.1 billion each year. At the moment, however, only 50 % of the immigrants are working, and this means an annual expense of DKR 14.3 billion for the Danish society. Denmark could thus make an extra DKR 23.4 billion if all immigrants had jobs. Bertel Harder, Minister of Integration from Venstre, Denmark's Liberal Party, therefore appeals to all citizens to assume responsibility for finding employment for immigrants.

Imagine Copenhagen without immigrants. To some politicians this would be a dream, to others a nightmare. However, such a reality would change the city considerably for the inhabitants of the capital of Denmark.

- ▶ You would not be able to reach your destination in time by bus. About 35 percent of all bus drivers are immigrants.
- ▶ You could not get a taxi instead. Almost 65 percent of all taxi drivers in Copenhagen have an ethnic background other than Danish.
- ▶ You would have to queue up outside restaurants. The majority of the restaurants in the city are owned by immigrants, and if you managed to enter a restaurant owned by a Dane, you would have to wait a long time for your food, as 86 per cent of these restaurants employ immigrants to staff their kitchens, or as waiters and dishwashers.
- ▶ You could not expect to be able to grab a sandwich, a kebab or a Chinese takeaway as an alternative, and no one would answer the phone if you called for a pizza. Immigrants control that market.

- ▶ You could not expect to be able to buy some food from your local greengrocer or at an all-night kiosk on your way home, either. Those shops would all be closed.
- ▶ You could not expect Copenhagen to be kept clean. About 80 per cent of all cleaning at city hotels is performed by employees with an immigrant background. The percentage is almost the same in offices and factories.
- ▶ You also have to take care not to break your leg, because there would be a shortage of doctors at the hospitals, where by now half of the new surgeons have an ethnic background other than Danish.
- ▶ You would have a problem getting your shopping at Netto, your local discount supermarket, because fifty per cent of the employees at the long-distance warehouse are immigrants. Some of the parcel post would be delayed because 80 per cent of the employees at the DHL distribution centre have an ethnic background other than Danish.
- ▶ Also, at DFD at Lyngby, a major workwear rental and laundering service, they would not be able to get all the clothes laundered because Mukhlis from Iraq, Dennis from Bosnia, Resul from Turkey and Peter from Nigeria would not be working there.

You could continue listing cases like that. There would be a shortage of labour in Copenhagen.

There are two sides to the issue

By now, those immigrants who have got jobs form such an integral part of society that we simply cannot do without them. They contribute their share to the Danish society, pay their taxes and do their jobs. It is not just these immigrants we hear about in the media, because there are two sides to the issue when it comes to immigrants in Denmark:

It is true that 49 per cent from non-western countries are unemployed. It is also true, however, that 51 percent are in fact employed. It is true that some immigrants avoid VAT and income tax, as proved by several raids by the Danish Central Customs and Tax Administration, but it is equally true that many immigrants do their jobs and pay VAT and their income tax on time.

It is true that some immigrants object when the authorities find them a job or a job training position, because they believe that they are too ill to work. But it is also true that some immigrants take the most dirty and poorly paid jobs and work unusual hours in order to be self-supporting.

However, there is no doubt that poor integration is very expensive for society as a whole. If immigrants do not get a job, they become burdens on society. However, if they do get a job they will be the mainstay of tomorrow's welfare state.

Whether immigrants are employed or not makes a cash difference of DKR 23 billion. That is more than the annual cost of the early retirement scheme.

A financial analysis of the society of tomorrow in fact concludes that the increasing number of elderly citizens in need of support in the near future would pose no problem at all, if only all immigrants were employed, but they are simply not all employed.

This is why Minister of Integration, Bertel Haarder (Venstre), has on behalf of the Government called lack of integration 'the biggest social problem of the future'.

The chlorine test

The Government has initiated a campaign in order to get employers to hire immigrants.

In cooperation with the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA), the Government has tried to make it easier for immigrants to gain access to the Danish labour market through a variety of schemes combining placement, probation and job training with only limited effect so far.

There are many reasons for this:

- ▶ Many immigrants are not able to speak Danish well enough so they end up failing the cleaning contractors' in-house tests, in which they are asked to read the label of a Chlorine bottle.
- ▶ In many instances it does not pay to be employed. The difference between a low-paid job and what the family will get in social security and housing benefits is no more than a few hundred DKR.
- ▶ Discrimination or just ordinary fear and unease on the part of employers mean that Hans will be employed before Hassan.
- ▶ Many immigrants never had any education or work experience in their original countries. Some might even be unfit for work because of trauma caused by war or civil war.
- ▶ In addition many employers doubt that an immigrant will be capable of making any money for the firm if he is to get the minimum wage of about DKR 85. However, all citizens must shoulder the

responsibility of trying to get immigrants a job so that they can contribute to the economy, says Bertel Haarder: 'I believe that by now ordinary Danes will understand the magnitude of the problem posed to society by poor integration. The secret is to transform this understanding from something negative into something positive. There is a tendency that whenever someone mentions 'major problems', this creates negative feelings towards foreigners, unless we remember to remind people where the problem lies. The problem is not the attitudes that the immigrants bring with them from their original countries, but the attitude with which the immigrants are met in the Danish Welfare Society.'

Give them a chance

Bertel Haarder urges Danish employers, local authorities and trade organizations to take chances and employ more immigrants on probation. 'The first job makes the difference. As soon as you gain access to the labour market, you can create a network, which is the way to get jobs in this country. In future, we therefore have to ensure that all forms of job training in businesses result in a testimonial. In this way, Muhammed has something concrete to proceed with. If one employer vouches for Muhammed, then maybe another will consider employing him. However, if this employer just reads the tabloids, he might believe that immigrants will develop bad backs and stay away already on the third day.' 'Give them a chance,' says Bertel Haarder.

3 good advices from Bertel Haarder

For the immigrants

- 1.** Make sure you get yourself a network of Danes that know you and can vouch for you.
- 2.** Attend your Danish classes. Too many immigrants speak a poor level of Danish. It is your own responsibility to learn the language.
- 3.** Do not wait around for the job you believe you have trained for. Take another.

For the Danes

1. Give help to those that are different; make sure you keep an open mind. Smile at an immigrant every day.
2. Object if someone behaves in an unfriendly way towards immigrants. Danes should not tolerate other Danes behaving badly towards immigrants.
3. Make demands on immigrants at all times, at the kindergarten, at school, or at their place of work. You must make those demands for their own sake and for the sake of society.

Bus Driver with Headscarf

MALIKA BOUMESHOULI, MOROCCO

Morocco-born Muslim, Malika Boumeshouli, is grateful that the Arriva bus company has given her a chance. She believes that many more immigrants should have a chance like that.

Malika Boumeshouli came to Denmark in 1990 as a result of family reunification to be with her Moroccan husband. Passengers often stare when they board bus number 5A in Copenhagen and see Malika Boumeshouli in the driver's seat.

It is not only that her 5 feet 5 inches do not take up much room behind the wheel the size of a family-sized pizza, but Malika is also wearing a Muslim headscarf when she is working as a bus driver with the Arriva bus company.

She is one of five female immigrants among the 747 drivers attached to the Ryvang depot – a bus depot where 35 percent of the drivers have an immigration background.

However, when the passengers have stared at her, they usually give her a smile or make a friendly remark. The majority are positive. And when she makes a joking remark in her resounding Copenhagen dialect, some passengers will have to make adjustments to the standard image of a Muslim woman with headscarf – unemployed housewife with a large number of children, no education and no spoken Danish.

Taking pains

'I know that many people are a little surprised to see a Muslim woman with a headscarf behind the wheel. That is why I take pains to make some friendly remarks to the passengers. I want to set a good example.' Malika does set a good example.

She followed the line of action that Minister of Integration Bertel Haarder (Venstre) has repeatedly urged immigrants and refugees to pursue.

When Malika came to Denmark, she took a job at a market garden after only four months at a language school.

'I did not understand or speak much Danish, but some of my colleagues knew both Danish and Arabic, so they translated for me. And then I stood watching what the others were doing and so I copied them. That way everything went well,' says Malika Boumeshouli.

Danish skills too limited

Having worked for about a year at the market garden, she got another job as a chambermaid at a hotel, initially in Roskilde and later in Copenhagen. Here she cleaned and made up the rooms, but her Danish skills were still very limited, and this became a problem when she had to pass a Danish test where she was meant to read and understand the labels on the cleaning materials. She failed.

'That was alright, really, because it's important for you to be able to read the instructions on the cleaning materials so you don't damage you own eyes or skin or ruin the furniture by using the wrong cleaning agent,' she says.

In order to improve her Danish, she signed up for a ten-month course at a 'day high school' for women, which helped. Eventually she learned so much Danish that she was able to get a vocational driving licence and after two attempts, she also passed the theory test.

She was well received by her new colleagues. 'I had nothing but positive feedback. In this company they don't look askance at me because I wear a headscarf, and they also accept the fact that I look for somewhere to perform my Muslim prayers when I have to pray.' 'It's a very open and tolerant workplace, which gives you room to be different, so I like my work here. I'm so pleased that Arriva gave me the chance, and I wish that many more immigrants could be given a similar chance,' says Malika.

Room for both faith and job

For Malika it is of vital importance to have the opportunity of following her religious persuasion and at the same time do her job. She often has time to kneel down to pray on the bus at the terminus before new passengers board the bus. or she will borrow a room at a nearby pizzeria.

When she is not at home, she always wears her headscarf.

‘The Koran tells us that Muslim women must cover their hair, so that is why I follow my God and do so,’ Malika explains. She lives alone with her 16-year-old daughter. The two of them get along well with their neighbours in the block of flats in Tingbjerg, northwest of Copenhagen. An elderly couple are the only Danes left in the building.

‘We often visit each other and have a very good relationship,’ says Malika. She has a clear objective for the future. ‘I want to create a good home for my daughter, so that she can get an education. She wants to attend Upper Secondary School when she has finished the tenth grade, and later she wants to go to university, for my daughter has a dream: she wants to become a solicitor. I’ll support her as much as I possibly can,’ says Malika.

Her employer on Malika

We are very pleased to have Malika working for us. She does her job well, and she is always happy and in a good mood. For us here, it is nothing to make a fuss about if she drives a bus wearing a headscarf. We have plenty of employees with other ethnic backgrounds.

Erik Grünfeld, Works Manager with Arriva at the Ryvang district

3 good advices from Malika Boumeshouli

For the immigrants

- 1.** Learn Danish or you will never get anywhere.
- 2.** Don’t give up, even though you get rejections when you apply for a job. Keep on trying; you will succeed eventually.
- 3.** Don’t be scared of the Danes. Try to get to know them and talk to them; they are not racists.



For the Danes

- 1.** You must give foreigners a chance. Some of them are actually very competent. Don't lump them all together.
- 2.** Travel and discover the world so that you can see how varied it is.
- 3.** Don't create inflexible attitudes based on what you see on television.

Hali's Long Hard Struggle

HALI MOHAMUD INDHAYARE, SOMALIA

Somali women are the group of foreigners who find it most difficult to get a job, but even though she is a single mother with no education, Hali Mohamud Indhayare succeeded in becoming a home care worker.

Hali Mohamud Indhayare came to Denmark in 1991 in order to escape the clan wars in Somalia – she was alone with four children, aged 6 to 16. Her husband did not join her.

It makes no difference to Magda Ruth Nielsen, nearly 78, whether the home care worker is Danish or has a different background.

'I don't care which country they come from. As long as they are nice and speak Danish.' She nods her grey curls in the direction of Hali Mohamud Indhayare from Somalia, who is busy clearing away after lunch in the small flat in the northern part of Århus. The Somali home care worker often visits Magda, who receives help four times a day. Magda's lungs are bad. She needs help from a ventilator for 18 hours out of 24 in order to be able to breathe. She has also used a walker ever since she fell and broke her thighbone. 'Hali is a big help,' says Magda Ruth Nielsen. 'She's great.'

Hali Mohamud Indhayare is happy about the praise. She has been through a long hard struggle in order to cross the barrier and gain access to the Danish labour market.

'I can now see that it pays to fight. You can win,' she says.

Hali spent her first years in Denmark attending a language school and following courses in Danish culture and social conditions. She had never received any proper education in her native country.

However, she did own a business in Somalia, where she imported clothes from, among other places, India and Thailand in order to sell them in her own shop, where she employed several assistants. With such a background, she was fully determined to support herself in Denmark.

She finally made it

She soon realised, however, that without a network and the ability to speak Danish, this was extremely difficult. She kept applying for jobs, while at the same time attending all kinds of council courses, but simply got one rejection after the other throughout the 1990s. She finally managed to get a job at a laundering service. She worked there for 18 months.

'I was so happy to be working. Even though it was physically very hard, the satisfaction of supporting myself put everything else in the shade. I had now got a foothold.'

The job at the laundering service was only temporary, however. 18 months later, she had to look for another job.

't This time everything felt easier, though. I'd proved to myself that I could support myself and my family. That gave me much more confidence when looking for another job.'

She still felt that for a Somali woman without an education it was extremely difficult to get a job. Hali was nevertheless fully determined to keep herself going. She learned that Denmark would be in need of care assistants in the health sector when, in a few years' time, great numbers of home care workers and assistant nurses would be retiring. She therefore sought admission to a one-year preparation course, after which she started at the school in Århus on the one-year care worker course. Like Hali many other women with an ethnic background other than Danish have spotted the job opportunities within the health sector. At the schools in both Århus and Copenhagen, the percentage of students with an ethnic background other than Danish has reached about 20.

Employed at the same place where she served her placement

As soon as Hali Mohamud Indhayare had got her certificate, she was employed at the same local centre, Fuglebakken & Bjerggården, in the northern part of Århus where she had done her placement. 'I love my job. It's very satisfying for me to be part of the Danish society and to prove that we Somalis can participate. It's very important to use your own capacity for work instead of claiming benefits from the local authorities. You must appear interested, committed and open. It's worth it. In the media you're always hearing that Somalis cannot work or that they refuse to work. It is my contention, however, that the Danish society is too suspicious of Somalis and does not give them a chance to join in,' she says.

'The big problem is that Danes don't know Somalis. They only know them from television, and it's nearly always negative publicity you get there. Elderly Danes in particular fear Somalis, but I do feel that they change their attitude when I visit them as a home care worker.'

Her children are also on their way to success

Hali knows how much it means to her four children that their mother has crossed the barrier and gained access to the labour market. As for the two youngest, 16 and 18, one will begin at Upper Secondary School after the summer holiday while the other is doing commercial training. All the children believe in a good future here in Denmark. Her 16-year-old daughter Mulki is proud that her mother is supporting herself. Mulki has just got herself a job after school at McDonald's for DKR 58 an hour. She is determined to make her A-levels lead to a pharmacy degree. Her mother is very pleased that her children are already orientated towards the labour market at an early age .

'I can feel that it means a lot to both my children and those around me that I'm working. It's something I can be rather proud of, don't you think?'

Her employer on Hali

Hali has worked hard to learn about Danish culture. It's not easy to know how a senior citizen wants her slices of rye bread served, but Hali is quick to understand the needs of our clients and she is offering good care.

Birgit Sørensen, District Manager, Local centre Fuglebakken & Bjerggården, Århus

3 good advice from Hali Mohamud Indhayare

For the immigrants

1. First of all you must learn to speak Danish.
2. Choose a course that will enable you to get a job fairly easily here in Denmark.
3. Don't ever give up, because your dream may come true if you really want it to.

For the Danes

1. Get to know the Somalis.
2. People are different. If you meet a person who behaves badly or is uncooperative, you must remember that not all people are like that.
3. Many Somali men and women are interested in gaining access to the Danish labour market. I hope employers will bear that in mind the next time they have to employ people.

They Want to Contribute More

SENCAN AND KEMAL ALTINTAS, TURKEY

Sencan and Kemal Altintas, a married couple from Turkey, are working very hard. He drives 210 km every day to work at a poultry slaughterhouse, and in his spare time he studies veterinary literature. She is a teacher and is also attending a management course. They are concerned that some politicians present Muslims as the enemy, for they believe that Islam is only about becoming a decent human being.

Sencan Altintas came to Denmark in 1973 at the age of two. In 1993 she married Kemal, and he came here as a result of family reunification to be with his wife.

There is a large TV in the living room at Sencan and Kemal Altintas's home. However, there is a limit to the amount of television that the Turkish couple have time to watch because they work so very hard. When Kemal Altintas (35) is working nights, he does not get back until almost midnight. When working days, he gets up at 4.20 to drive for more than an hour from their home in Odense to Danpo poultry slaughterhouse west of Give in Jutland, where he is working as a vet in the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. When he gets home, he attacks his books because his ambition is one day to become a consultant veterinary surgeon.

His wife, 32-year-old Sencan, spends most of her leisure time attending a management course that her Principal encouraged her to follow. The Principal believes that the young Turkish woman has the abilities to become a Principal herself one day. Then there are the two children, 8-year-old daughter Sule and four-year-old son Baki.

They watch television – in Danish, that is. The parents have the clear objective of wanting their children to be able to speak Danish just as fluently as their contemporaries at kindergarten and school who come from Danish homes. This is because the children must get an education. Kemal Altintas states that that is the way forward. He already hopes that Sule – who has proved to be very bright – will one day become a doctor.

The parents' own experience tells them that education is the way to get good jobs, and that it pays to work hard.

They are telling me this at home in their new cosy single-family detached house. Having lived for ten years in a flat in Vollsmose, the couple have now been able to afford to buy their own home. So far, they are the only immigrant family on the residential street.

The dream of a tractor

Sencan came to Denmark from a village in Turkey at the age of two. Her father, who was a shepherd, came here as a migrant worker in the 1970s in order to make money for a tractor. The family settled in Vamdrup. Eventually his dream of a tractor was replaced by a plan to create a good life for his family in Denmark. This is because he considered the prospects for a hardworking family to be better here, and the means to be education.

Today, the migrant worker's two sons have become engineers and his two daughters schoolteachers. Sencan was one of the first Turkish girls in Denmark who attended Upper Secondary School, and she was also one of the first to become a qualified teacher from the college of education in Odense with English and religion as her main subjects.

She got a job already before her final exam, and today she is working at Humlehave School in Odense, where she is a class teacher for year seven.

Sencan met her future husband Kemal back home in the village in Turkey where they both were on holiday.

Their families knew each other, and the marriage was arranged. She and her family wanted to make sure that she married a Turk. That was a deliberate choice.

There isn't a huge number of a well-educated Turkish man here in Denmark,' she points out today.

The two young people were very happy to get married. They had known each other for many years and had long been attracted to each other when they met on vacations in the village. They both also thought logically about the situation, believing that the other person would make a good spouse. They were married in July 1993.

The negative debate

They were not sure where to settle to begin with. Kemal had a good chance of getting a job in Turkey and Sencan was somewhat unhappy about staying in Denmark because of the tone of the Danish debate on foreigners:

‘It was stressful always to be mentioned in the third person by the media, even though you adapted to the Danish society and did all you could to become integrated. They still regarded you as an immigrant,’ she says today, looking back on the debate on foreigners in the 1990s.

However, Kemal wanted to go to Denmark, because there seemed to be a more of future there.

‘I had had good reports on the country from my cousins, and it was a bit of an adventure as I had never been outside Turkey before,’ says Kemal Altintas.

Kemal did not know one word of Danish, when he arrived in this country. But he did bring two things: a Turkish degree as a veterinary surgeon and a strong determination to make it on his own.

He immediately started at a language school and soon got an unskilled job at a market garden in order to make his own money and improve his Danish.

After 18 months he was ready to begin his education to become a Danish vet.

Every day for three years he went by bus and train from Odense to the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Copenhagen – a five-hour journey each day. Three of the hours he spent studying.

‘Many of my friends told me that it was impossible for me to take a Danish course and get a job in Denmark because I was an immigrant. Many older immigrants in particular have that opinion. It was a real struggle for me, but I wanted to prove that I could do it. It was a struggle partly because most of the books were in English so now I had to learn a third language as well.’

But he did it.

Kemal graduated as a veterinary surgeon. He immediately applied for three jobs and got an interview at all three places. He chose the job as a vet at the poultry slaughterhouse, even though he has to drive 210 kilometres each day. There he runs checks on the animals, draws up staff rotas and writes export certificates, among other things.

‘It’s a challenging and interesting job with good prospects for development,’ he says.

Immigrants like Kemal play an increasing role in the food industry. About fifty per cent of all employees in the poultry company Danpo have an ethnic background other than Danish.

The job as Principal is her goal

Sencan has the same attitude to her job as a teacher. She is taking a three-year management course. She has to study at home and set aside entire weekends five to six times a year.

Her goal is to become a Principal. She may become the first Danish Principal wearing a headscarf, but she does not want to make an issue of her headscarf.

‘I’ve fought hard to be the competent colleague rather than the woman with the scarf, and I’ll continue doing that.’

She believes that several politicians and public debaters exaggerate whatever differences there might be between, some interpretations of Islam on the one hand and Danish society on the other.

a totally reasonable person. My headscarf is only an expression of my perception of my faith. I’m a practising Muslim; I felt my faith required me to wear a scarf. To me, it is a private matter between me and my Maker,’ says Sencan Altintas. Moderation plays a major role for the Turkish family in Odense.

Sencan says: ‘Most religions are about being a good person. Doing good unto others means the same will happen to you later. I believe Christianity and Islam have many things in common in that respect, so I feel it’s a great pity that some politicians and public debaters portray Islam as the enemy. It is extremely unpleasant at the moment since it has become the West versus Islam, now that we no longer talk about the West versus the East. At the end of the day, it affects people like us who consider ourselves very Danish,’ she says.

Religious guideline

Kemal Altintas wants Danes to realise that many Muslims do not regard Islam as more than a personal faith which is to act as a guideline in their lives: ‘Religion means a lot to me. I’m a Muslim, and it’s an important part of my life, but I’m also an active citizen in the democratic Danish society.

At the moment, I’m not practising a great deal. I pray maybe once or twice a day, some days not at all. I believe that we live in this world for a kind of trial period. When we die, we may live on in a life after death – if we have behaved as decent human beings.’

‘You become a better person by practising your religion if you see it as a guideline for the way to behave as a decent human being.

It does not matter whether you’re a practising Muslim or Christian. You have to be positive and think well of other people. In my opinion, both religions are about being a responsible human being towards yourself, your family and the people around you and strive to be a better person – and thus not be selfish and narrow-minded. We need that sort of responsible person in the world,’ says Kemal Altintas.

His employer on Kemal

Kemal is very diligent, meticulous and patient. His Danish is very good and he fits in well into our control unit. Then it is an added bonus that he is able to communicate more easily than others with many of the employees who also have a Turkish background.

Regional Veterinary Officer Ole Wienicke, Danpo poultry slaughterhouse in Farre

Her employer on Sencan

It is my dream that one day Sencan will become the first Principal in Denmark wearing a headscarf. She has all the necessary qualities to become a good Principal. She is intelligent and very dedicated.

Olav Nielsen, Principal, Humlehave School, Odense

3 good advices from Sencan and Kemal

For the immigrants

- 1.** Show respect if you want to be treated with respect.
- 2.** It's important to know about Danish culture and to be able to speak Danish well enough for people to understand you.
- 3.** Invite your colleagues to visit you in your home. We believe that private friendships are one of the ways to improve integration .

For the Danes

- 1.** Take time to talk to your colleagues with an immigrant background. Be open, and feel free to ask questions.
- 2.** Don't give up on people because their Danish is not perfect. It is usually possible to communicate anyway.
- 3.** Visit one other privately and talk to one other.

'Never Give Up'

SHIDEH POUR ZAHED, IRAN

Shideh Pour Zahed knows what it means *not* to give up. The clerical regime in Iran stole her youth and sent her to prison when she was between 16 and 21 years old. She has managed to move on by struggling hard, and she urges other refugees and immigrants to do the same.

Shideh Pour Zahed came to Denmark in 1992 as a result of family reunification to be with her husband, who had arrived in Denmark in 1984 as a refugee from Iran.

It was probably not meant in a negative way, that time at the departmental 'Christmas' party.

It still made the Iranian doctor Shideh Pour Zahed a little sad when the Consultant lifted his eyebrows and said, when Shideh accepted a glass of wine: 'Oh, would you also dare drink alcohol at home?'

Apparently the Consultant thought that she was a poor oppressed Muslim woman.

'I do wish that Danes knew a bit more about the countries that the refugees and immigrants come from. Had the Consultant known more about the situation, he would know that female Iranian refugees in Denmark have escaped from a Muslim clerical regime and therefore often aren't religious at all, and that we have equal rights with our husbands,' says Shideh.

She is not religious herself, but believes in decent morals, proper behaviour and an extremely developed perception of justice and equality.

'To me, women's rights are more important than both nationality and religion, but that may be because I've experienced the cost of fighting for what you believe.'

Five years in prison

At the age of 16 Shideh was imprisoned by the clerical regime in Teheran for having distributed on the streets a newspaper that was critical of the government. They did not let her out until she was 21.

The five years in 'darkness' as she calls it have done two things to her:

Not only do they mean that sometimes she is close to falling down into an abyss of darkness, but at the same time they mean that she has the strength to do the opposite – she fights for what is good.

'Well, I don't mean to sound too sentimental, but I've learned never to give up. You have to believe in the use of continuing to fight.'

It was also a struggle when she came to Denmark in 1992 to join her husband as a result of family reunification. She had excellent exam results. After the years in prison she studied mathematics and physics, among other things, at the University of Teheran for four years. She also had references because she had been teaching alongside her own studies.

However, those papers were worth nothing in Denmark.

Studies in record time

‘I was told that they were worth less than the Danish school leaving exams. So I started all over again.

‘I did so at record speed.’

In one year she took the school-leaving examinations after both year nine and year ten.

In another year she finished her school leaving exams, with a 9.9 average (approximate equivalent of grade A).

In record time, she passed her medical studies at the University of Århus, three years’ syllabus in six months. Despite the pace, she also took time off to take part in the social life.

Shideh made an effort to attend most of the [inverted commas!] ‘Friday’ bars – except when she had to pick up her son, to whom which she gave birth three months before she started studying medicine.

‘I’m good at parties. I particularly love the traditional Danish office ‘Christmas’ parties. They are sofriendly.’

Surgeon in demand

When Shideh finished her degree in medicine in June 2002, she was lucky enough to get her eighteenth-month compulsory graduate terms of hospital service in Århus county, so that the family could stay in the city. In that way her husband could continue his job as the one in charge of computers and machines in a furniture factory in the suburbs. He came to Denmark in 1984 as a refugee. Her son was also able to continue at the Interschool, a private internationally-oriented school in Århus.

Shideh has just started in an introductory position as surgeon at Århus Hospital – and she can expect to be much in demand when she becomes a specialist in surgery. At the moment Denmark lacks 800 doctors, particularly within surgery.

‘I have a dream about one day becoming a specialist within plastic surgery for women with breast cancer. You must have a goal in life, even if it is far ahead in the future,’ she says.

Three fronts

She says that she is truly happy about her job, and she gets along well with both colleagues and patients. 'But I do feel I have to fight on three fronts every day, partly because I'm a woman, as women are still regarded as less stable labour because of pregnancies and child care, partly because I don't have the same network as Danish doctors, but I constantly have to convince everybody that I know my profession – and finally because I'm a foreigner. All the time I have to prove that my culture poses no threat to my work. I even go so far as to put the ham on top of the cheese in my sandwich so that I'm sure that everybody can see that I *do* eat pork,' she says with a merry laugh.

Negative politicians

Shideh and her family like it here in Denmark, but sometimes she can feel quite tired when she is watching politicians on TV presenting immigrants in a negative light.

'I feel sorry for the Danes if well-educated immigrants leave the country because of a general negative attitude. We have so many resources that we would like to use for the benefit of the Danish society.'

Her employer on Shideh

Shideh does extremely well in this department. She is a very pleasant person, and both patients and her colleagues like her. Her professional qualifications are fully on the level with those of other doctors. Linguistically there are no problems whatsoever.

Peter Rasmussen, Managing Consultant,
Parankym Abdominal Surgical Department, Århus Hospital

3 good advices from Shideh Pour Zahed

For the immigrants

1. Choose education that Denmark needs.
2. Learn the language so you reach the level you need.
3. Fight to become part of society. This is our country, too. Never give up trying to become part of society.



For the Danes

1. Be open-minded. We are in the middle of a long process.
2. Accept people's differences.
3. Give people a chance.

My Children have a Future in Denmark

MIRWAIS WAZARI, AFGHANISTAN

Even though his Danish is not fluent, Mirwais Wazari from Afghanistan is able to hold down an unskilled job, minding the machines at the factory. He is pleased that his children have got good prospects in Denmark.

Mirwais Wazari came to Denmark in 2001 when he was forced to flee the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

You are sure to find Mirwais Wazari in front of the TV when they are showing 'Krøniken' – 'the chronicle', a series about life in Denmark in the 1950s and 60s. [TEXT MISSING]

'In the old days, Danes used to talk more slowly, so it was much easier to understand what they were saying, and at the same time you learned about Danish history,' the 35-year old refugee from Afghanistan says.

On a normal day at the factory, he occasionally finds it difficult to understand what his colleagues at Gemina Termix Productions A/S in Sunds near Herning are saying.

'Sometimes I only understand half of it, but then I just ask. My colleagues are good people and they are very helpful,' he says.

When Mirwais Wazari sometimes finds it difficult to grasp the many oral messages and written order sheets, it is because he got a job very quickly.

He attended language school for only 14 months before he declared himself ready to work.

Initially he started at the factory on an introductory scheme. The factory produces district heating units; it has 55 employees and exports 30 percent of the production.

Escape from the Taliban

Mirwais Wazari is proud to be a part of life at the factory and to earn DKK 95 an hour. By now he has learned to work six of the machines at the factory. He is quite satisfied with that, since he knew nothing about that kind of production when he started.

He worked for eight years as a policeman in Kabul, before the Taliban came into power, and he was forced to flee the country.

'I was lucky to get asylum in Denmark, and I've been lucky to get a job. Now I hope we can continue to have a good life here in this country,' he says.

Mirwais attends language school in his spare time in order to improve his Danish. He and his wife, who came to this country about a year after he did, take pains to keep themselves informed about the Danish society by watching Danish news programmes and other Danish programmes.

Mirwais likes watching interior designer programmes because he is hoping to be able to move from their concrete flat in the housing association to another flat where he can make his own mark on his surroundings.

His wife has studied journalism in Kabul, but here she is on maternity leave at the moment. The couple have two children, a five year-old girl and a boy of six months.

When his wife has ended her maternity leave, she will try learning enough Danish so that she can begin studying to become a kindergarten teacher.

Determined to learn

At the moment Mirwais is quite satisfied being an unskilled worker at the factory. I would like to take some more courses, such as computer courses, so that I can learn to work some more machines,' he says.

As a Sunni Muslim he prays five times a day. On most days, he does all his praying at home, but occasionally he finds a quiet corner in which to pray.

'I do it quietly so that it won't bother anyone, and nobody ever makes comments about it. I'm a Muslim, but I read the Koran without being orthodox. Neither is my wife; she doesn't wear a scarf, for instance,' he says.

Even though the children are still very young, Mirwais is already considering their future.

'They need a good education. I would certainly be glad if one day my son becomes a policeman and my daughter becomes a doctor. At any rate, we are hoping that we as parents have helped to improve their chances of a better future by being here in Denmark. That's why I'm so pleased that I can now be part of the labour market,' says Mirwais Wazari.

His employer on Mirwais

Mirwais wants to integrate and makes a huge effort to achieve that. He gets along well in this country. When you get to know immigrants or refugees personally, you get a different perception of them from the one you get if you just hear about such matters on television.

Anders Knudsen, Production Manager, Gemina Termix Productions A/S

3 good advices from Mirwais Wazari

For the immigrants

- 1.** Learn the language as quickly as possible, so that it will get easier for you to gain access to the labour market.
- 2.** Apply for jobs as soon as you can and try to become an active part of Danish society.
- 3.** Make sure you get in contact with Danes, read newspapers and watch Danish TV, so that you can get to know the Danish society.

For the Danes

- 1.** Help immigrants to learn the Danish language. It is not an easy language.
- 2.** Don't look at immigrants as people who just lies around in bed, claiming social security benefits. Many of us are in fact working.
- 3.** Get in touch with immigrants and get to know immigrant families.

One Day She Got Help to Get In

GOWSALY GIRUBAGARAN, SRI LANKA

Even though you are not a hundred percent confident in the Danish language, it is possible to hold down a job, says Tamil Gowsaly Girubakaran. She has found her dream job as a cleaner at a hotel in Herning.

Gowsaly Girubakaran came to Denmark in 1992 with her husband – the son of her neighbour in Jaffna in the northern part of Sri Lanka - as a result of family reunification. He came to Denmark in 1986. She had often passed the fashionable Hotel Scandic. It was that kind of place she wanted to work. Everything looked so nice and clean, but she had never had the courage to enter the place. She was much too shy.

That is why she can hardly believe it is true: In a few weeks she will have a permanent position at the hotel. Her probation period is nearly over, and the Matron has said she is willing to employ her.

So Gowsaly Girubakaran knows the advice she would give other immigrants: Make use of local council's employment consultants – they are there to help you.

For it was through Herning Council's employment consultant that Gowsaly got the job as chambermaid at the hotel.

After having taking a number of courses in hygiene, among other things, she told the employment consultant that she would like to work at the hotel and together they went there and got them to take her on probation.

'I would never have dared go in there on my own. I'm glad someone helped me because I really love working there,' Gowsaly says today.

She works 20-25 hours a week cleaning the hotel, changing the bed linen, making the beds, cleaning the bathrooms and doing the hoovering.

Job gives you self-confidence

Gowsaly does the job just as well as the six Danish women working with her, says the Hotel Matron, Tove Jensen. Tove Jensen had never before employed a person with an ethnic background other than Danish, and she was a little sceptical, but today she is glad she did it. 'Everything is working well,' she says. Getting the job has given Gowsaly a lot of self-confidence.

'I brought my son with me to work one Sunday, and afterwards he proudly told the others about his mother's job,' the Tamil woman says.

Her husband has worked for several years at Danpo poultry slaughterhouse in Give, but developed some problems with the cold temperature in the slaughterhouse. He has now got a vocational driving licence and is looking for a job as a driver.

The parents' contact with the labour market has greatly influenced the way they see their children's future. The eldest child, seven-year old son Jegiin, has just started school, while his younger sister Jeshena is in a day nursery. After only six months the children were put into day care, because both parents wanted to attend language school and learn Danish as quickly as possible so they could join the labour market.

Danish children's programme on television

'We wanted our children to mix with Danish children and Danish kindergarten teachers as soon as possible so that they would learn the language. We make an effort to read Danish books aloud to our children. We also make sure that they watch 'Fjernsyn for dig', a Danish children's programme on TV, and we are very happy about the Danish playmates they have got. We want them to do well here in Denmark,' says Gowsaly.

She and her husband also do a lot to keep up with the development of Danish society, among other things by watching the news on TV every day – particularly the local news. They are able to get a Tamil TV station via satellite, but they mostly use that to watch films at the weekend.

Gowsaly still attends language school twice a week. She particularly looks forward to Monday's lessons because then her textbook will be 'Personnel Handbook from the Hotel Scandic', so she can learn the words and expressions she will need to know during a normal working day.

The future is here

The family are Hindus, but according to Gowsaly it does not make much difference to their everyday lives. 'Our eldest child knows more about Christianity than Hinduism because he hears about it in school. We don't mind that, because that way he will understand the Danish culture better,' she says.

Gowsaly's brothers and sisters and her parents have also fled the civil war in Sri Lanka and live in the United Kingdom and in Italy. This means that the family is scattered over several countries, but there is no doubt in Gowsaly's mind where her future lies.

'I still see myself as a Tamil, and I suppose my children are Tamils, too, but they are also Danes,' she says.

Her employer on Gowsaly

It is the first time we have employed an immigrant at this hotel in the 17 years I have been Matron. Gowsaly does her job perfectly and has settled in and gets along well with the others, and since she came I have become more tolerant towards immigrants.

Matron Tove Jensen, Scandic Hotel, Herning

3 good advices from Gowsaly Girubakaran

For the immigrants

1. Take some sort of education, for example in hygiene or a kitchen assistant course; that makes it easier to get a job.
2. Talk to Danes; try to get in touch with them and read the papers.
3. Make use of the local authorities' various offers and initiatives. They are in fact very good.

For the Danes

1. Help the immigrants who get a job or a job training position to get started.
2. Talk to immigrants, at the bus stop as well.
3. Be willing to help immigrants, in your spare time as well.

'I'm Proud of my Pay Cheque'

YOUSSEF EL-DERINI, STATELESS PALESTINIAN FROM LEBANON

When the newspapers write about Palestinians, they usually discuss unemployment, demonstrations or young people committing crimes. Youssef El-Derini does not want to talk about such topics. He prefers to tell us how proud he is to be working in the Bilka department store.

Youssef El-Derini came to Denmark in 1987 at the age of 19 as a stateless Palestinian from Lebanon.

In the grocery department in Bilka in Odense, Youssef El-Derini is in a very good mood, particularly around the beginning of the month.

This is when he notices that his wage has been paid into his bank account, and he becomes happy and proud.

'I've got a job. I support my family. I manage very well for myself here in Denmark,' he says.

Financially his working 37 hours a week in Bilka does not bring him much of a profit.

In reality he, his wife and their three children make only a few hundred DKR from his job compared to when he received social security benefits. In accordance with the law, every time his income increases, his wife's benefits are reduced.

Supporting yourself

Youssef El-Derini is not concerned about that, however:

'What is important is that you're able to support yourself. It's less important how much money you make. It's the feeling of achieving something and being able to support yourself that counts,' he says.

He had nine years of school education in Beirut, and – like so many other boys in the city – he had been helping out at a garage in his spare time. On the basis of this, his Danish teacher at the language school in Odense got him admitted at Technical College after only six months.

He was apprenticed to a car painter, but nine months before his apprenticeship test the skin on his hands became chapped because of his work with car paint. You still notice that when you shake hands with him – his hands feel like sandpaper.



He received social security benefits for a period but he wanted a job.

'I was prepared to take any job, where my hands would not pose a problem. I didn't feel good about staying at home doing nothing,' he says.

Offered job training

One day he was offered a job training position for three months in Bilka. The authorities paid his wages for the three-month period, giving the department store the opportunity to assess him. At first this led to an extension for two three-month periods. Now he has a permanent position. Today he works in the grocery department, where he helps with ordering more goods and putting them on the shelves.

His ambition is to constantly improve at his job so that one day he may become a department manager and be in charge of purchase, for instance, and the contact of the sales representatives in Bilka's beer and soft drinks department.

He also feels that Bilka and other department stores are interested in employing people with another ethnic background. In Bilka in Odense about nine percent of the employees have ethnic backgrounds other than Danish.

In other department stores owned by Dansk Supermarked the percentage is even higher: for instance, 27.3 per cent in Føtex in Vesterbro in Copenhagen, 22 per cent in Bilka in Ishøj and 23 percent in Føtex in City Vest in Århus. Youssef El-Derini is content that immigrants and refugees are getting opportunities within this line of business: 'As for me, I take one step at the time, and at the moment I just keep on trying to improve every day.'

Wife and three children

In 1994 Youssef El-Derini married his Palestinian wife, who came here from her home in Syria as a result of family reunification. Today the couple have three children aged seven, four and one month respectively. For the moment, his wife stays at home in the flat in Tarup while she is on maternity leave, but when that is over she would like to get a job as a kindergarten teacher's assistant.

Youssef El-Derini has many good colleagues where he works. They sometimes phone each other at home, but so far they have not visited each other yet.

'There is a kind of family feeling at this work place. We have a good relationship. There is a good atmosphere, and I feel comfortable every day – both when I'm among my colleagues and among the customers,' he says.

The best day

The best day of all is pay day, of course. 'I look at the figures on the bank statement and think: I've worked for that money. I've earned it myself. That makes me proud. When the money was social security benefits I was never completely happy.'

Youssef El-Derini is a Muslim. To him that entails following one of Islam's five pillars which dictates that you pray five times a day. In principle, some of the times for prayer fall within his working hours.

'I never pray at my workplace, though. I just wait until I get home. That means I can take care of both my job and my faith,' he says.

His employer on Youssef

Having got to know Youssef during the probation period with subsidised pay, there was no doubt in our minds that we would like to employ him. Today he is on completely the same level as other employees. He is clever and diligent.

Lars Jacobsen, Personal Manager, Bilka, Odense

3 good advices from Youssef El-Derini

For the immigrants

1. From the very first day at work you must listen carefully to what your boss tells you.
2. Try to make friends at work. That will make everything much easier.
3. Do your job and do it well.

For the Danes

1. Make the immigrants feel welcome at the work place and show them the ropes.
2. Think of immigrants as people who want to work and do something.
3. Treat an immigrant the way you would treat a Dane.

'Hello, Brother'

MOHAMMAD ALKAFAWI, IRAQ

His first job gave him net pay of DKR 2 an hour. Today, three years later, Mohammad Alkafawi pays DKR 10,000 a month in taxes. His story is an illustration of integration.

Mohammad Alkafawi came to Denmark in 2001. The family fled Saddam Hussein's regime after his father had been executed.

What do you do if you are a foreigner and are thrown into a Danish firm with 800 employees and do not know which of them is Lars, Jens and Mads or Susanne, Marianne and Anne?

Mohammad Alkafawi found his own method when he began working at the Novozymes company.

When he arrived in the morning, he said 'Hello, brother' to all the men and 'Hello, sister' to all the women.

That made people smile, greet him and say hello, so it was a very effective way. Today, all the colleagues know who Mohammad is.

He has a depressing background. Mohammad's father was a Professor of Physiology at Baghdad University. Suddenly and without any explanation he was picked up by Saddam Hussein's militia and thrown into prison. Four years later the family heard a knock at the door; some soldiers from the militia were standing outside demanding money for four bullets – the bullets they had used when they executed Mohammad's father.

As soon as it could be arranged, the family fled Baghdad. Mohammad had studied chemistry at the university and taken a Bachelor's Degree.

'It was probably the most difficult moment of my life. I had to make a fresh start with everything in life,' he says.

Quick to find employment

As soon as he was granted asylum in Denmark in 2001, he started at a language school, but after just six months, he asked the local authorities to find him a job.



Having studied his papers, a local council's integration advisor got him a trainee position at Novozymes. This is a biotechnological company with 3 900 employees; it is a world leader within the field of enzymes and micro-organisms for a great number of different products.

He received DKR 600 in addition to his integration benefits in return for his work as a trainee at the company. After deducting his expenses for his bus pass, he had hourly pay of DKR 2. But he was more than happy at having been able to make a start.

'I was received with great openness. They just looked at my papers and immediately decided to give me a chance,' he says.

When Novozymes subsequently needed a chemical engineer, the management encouraged Mohammad Alkafawi to apply for the position.

Six applicants were granted an interview, and the company chose Mohammad, even though his Danish was not perfect. He now had a salary of just over DKR 26,000 a month. 'I'm proud that I can support myself. I'm not a burden on Danish society. I'm pleased to contribute to the community by paying my taxes,' he says, his Danish somewhat hesitant but nevertheless correct. 'I'm somebody.'

Intensive Danish course

Three evenings a week he goes straight from work to spend three hours on an intensive Danish course. Mohammad Alkafawi's story could therefore have come straight from page one of a handbook on integration:

Even before finishing his three-year integration period, he is already supporting himself, speaks Danish and contributes to the Danish Welfare Society.

That is precisely the goal the Danish Parliament has set for the future integration effort in Denmark.

Mohammad Alkafawi's future is in Denmark.

'I don't want to move any more. I can't start all over again every five years. This is where I want to create a life for myself, and I believe that I have something to offer Danish society.'

When it comes to family and a possible future marriage, it will make no difference to Mohammad Alkafawi whether his wife is a Muslim, a Christian or an atheist.

'The person is more important than her religion,' he says. Mohammad has 60 colleagues in the building at Novozymes. They are no longer 'brothers' or 'sisters', because he knows now which of them is Lars, and which is Susanne.

But people have not forgotten his unusual greeting from when he started work at the company. We are given a proof of that as we are walking towards the exit and are overtaken by a white-clad operator from the granulation room. He turns and sends Mohammad a friendly greeting: 'Hello, brother.'

His employer on Mohammad

Mohammad is an extremely competent employee, and his language is steadily improving because he is working so hard to learn Danish. He is extremely friendly, obliging and sociable, and he has a very good way of making contact with his colleagues.

Stig Winther Nielsen, Department Manager, Novozymes

3 good advices from Mohammad Alkafawi

For the immigrants

- 1.** Concentrate on learning Danish as quickly as possible.
- 2.** Believe in yourselves.
- 3.** Remember that Danes are humans, too. Do not feel nervous about them but mingle with them.

For the Danes

- 1.** Remember that not all foreigners are alike. Do not generalise, but look at the individual person.
- 2.** Remember that openness is a general trend in Danish society.
- 3.** Use the positive aspects of other people's opinions even though they differ from your own.

