

Points of view from Denmark

- meeting in Mechelen, Belgium

Elements we recognize from our countries

Intercultural competencies – Soumia El Majoub

In our job related to integration and diversity management – especially in organisations with a short experience with ethnic minorities among the employees - we often hear about situations where something is missing or something is wrong. Is it a cultural mismatch? Does it have something to do with lacking language skills? Is it the very special kind of company that exceptionally is not able to offer that kind of flexibility to ethnic minorities? What is the matter? The issue is not necessarily whether to keep the ethnic minority employee or not. The issue is very often how much this employee needs to learn and to adapt to the organisation. Often the difficulties lies in the ability or will to see the issue as a common issue – that the solution is not only further education and knowledge building to the ethnic minority. It is as much an organisational challenge – to develop the organisation to be able to gain from the diversity.

The case Soumia presented was a very illustrative example of lacking intercultural competencies and the need for organisational development.

To give chances - Sleep Well

We are very fond of the underlined point that was presented to us at Sleep Well – to give chances and to focus on the potential for development. To our experience, it is very important clearly and constructively to distinguish between social obligation/responsibility and diversity management in communicating about ethnic integration – between the aim of helping other people and the business case. It applies to both private and public organisations. In the aim of making organisations engage in the integration effort, one of the barriers can be quite narrow pictures of what characteries ethnic minorities as labour force. We need to utilise a terminology that both presents ethnic minorities in a constructive and resource focused way and in a realistic and loyal way to the organisations.

This terminology ‘to give chances’ and ‘to focus on the potential for development’ is another very relevant and significant expression to utilise in our communication with the different companies. It puts attention to the resources and the contingent need for special attention and support in a period of time – as a precondition for becoming an equally competent and engaged employee.

Elements that surprise us or that we find different from our own countries

Match between educational competencies and job

Soumia El Majoub told about the educational challenges in Belgium:

- That only few of those entering a higher education complete the education.
- And that only a few of those completing a higher education get a job that corresponds to their educational competencies.

In Denmark, there is another clear tendency:

- Those completing a higher education in Denmark are also employed in jobs corresponding to their educational competencies.
- On the other hand, those with a higher education from their country of origin do not in the same scale get corresponding jobs. Unfortunately for them and the society in general, a significant amount is employed as pizza bakers, cleaners, taxi drivers etc.

Residence and permit

It was shocking to hear the testimonials from Arash Yazdani and Agnes Dekomenian! To live illegally! Not to know whether to stay or not. Not to be able to work

In comparison with Denmark, I am not sure what system I would prefer as an asylum seeker. In Denmark we have a system with three different procedures. This means that the asylum seeking process can take several years – seven years is not unusual. The procedures are:

- the normal procedure carried out by the Danish Immigration Service
- the appeal procedure carried out by the Refugee Appeals Board
- and as the last chance - the procedure for humanitarian residence permit carried out by the Ministry of Integration.

The Ministry's ruling regarding a humanitarian residence permit is final. This means that the ruling cannot be appealed to any other administrative authority. If your application is rejected, you are expected to leave the country as soon as possible. If you do not, you will live a very poor life with no freedom and only a minimum of necessities.

In Belgium you have the possibility to make your situation better via education, language skills etc. in the aim of getting a residence permit. In Denmark it is totally up to some predefined criteria. Either you are granted residence permit, or you are not – depending whether you can bring your story to the medias.