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Policy Brief - DENMARK

**The project aims**

**EMILIE PROJECT OVERVIEW**

EMILIE examines the migration and integration experiences of nine EU Member States and attempts to respond to the new challenges that multiculturalism is facing in Europe in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. EMILIE studies three important areas: Education; Discrimination in the workplace; Voting rights and civic participation, in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Spain and the UK. EMILIE aims to:

- track the relationship between migration-related diversity and citizenship, i.e. multicultural citizenship, across these EU countries; and
- identify whether multicultural citizenship is emerging in Europe, and if so what distinctive patterns and types can distinguished.

**Case studies**

EMILIE conducted three policy-related case studies in each country. The first set of case studies focused on education policy and the measures and practices adopted in dealing with cultural diversity in secondary education. The second set of case studies assessed the implementation of the EU 2000 Anti-Discrimination Directives in the different national contexts. And the third set of case studies investigated voting rights and overall issues of political participation and representation of migrant communities and ethnic minorities in the countries studied.

**Definitions**

(Multicultural) Citizenship: The notion of citizenship requires a self-governing political community in which individuals have rights and correlative duties enforced by law but are likely to also have a sense of shaping and being shaped by a public space that goes beyond law and politics. Multicultural citizenship debates ask how citizenship can be fully enacted for and by individuals that are culturally diverse.

**Methods, data and period of reference**

Each case study focuses in the last twenty year period (from 1989 till today). Data collected include policy documents, media coverage, scholarly studies, statistical data, qualitative interviews with key informants, and where it has been possible discussion groups with civil society actors and policy makers.

**Focus**

The project is concerned with migration-related cultural diversity and not with historical, native ethnic minorities. Special attention is paid to religious diversity and issues concerning Muslim migrants as their integration in European societies has been approached as increasingly challenging in these EU Member States.

**Main findings**

**Overall trends in the political participation of ethnic minorities in Denmark**

In comparison to most other European countries, ethnic minorities in Denmark have had more opportunities to formally participate in the country's political life. Since the 1980s, the state has secured a degree of inclusion for ethnic minorities both at the local and national levels of political life, and foreigners have the right to vote at local elections after three years of legal residence. However, two developments that have gradually occurred since 2002, namely tightened rules of naturalisation on the one hand and cuts in funding for ethnic minority organizations on the other, have rendered political participation of ethnic minorities more difficult. Danish citizenship is a prerequisite for participation in national elections, and ethnic minority organizations have proven important both for channeling claims into the political system and as a basis for ethnic candidates in local elections.

- **Local elections** are the political arena in which most ethnic minority members are eligible to participate. Although ethnic minority members tend to participate less than native Danes in local elections, when compared with other countries that have granted voting rights to non-citizens, then Denmark ranks among the countries with the highest rates of participation of non-nationals.
- **Ethnic minority political participation in elections, political consultations, and related public debates** have been increasing across Denmark. Ethnic minorities are also increasing their political representation in accordance with their size as an electorate, both at the local and national levels. There are of course significant differences regarding the level of participation among different immigrant groups, among municipalities and, most of all between the local and national levels.
- Where the **institutional design** (such as electoral rules) invites the participation of ethnic minorities, they are able to participate in a constructive way. Without institutional incentives and support, however, it is difficult for ethnic minorities to penetrate the political system, especially at the national level.
- Access to **citizenship** by naturalisation has been tightened since 2002, creating a steadily growing group of permanent residents that are excluded from national elections and political office.

**Political participation at local and national level**

The political participation of ethnic minorities in decision-making varies significantly between the local and the national level in Denmark. Ethnic minorities have little influence on nation-wide political decisions; they do, however, have some influence on local political decisions, affecting their everyday life. At the municipal level, many cities have well-functioning integration councils that include and give a voice to migrants' claims and concerns through their networks with immigrant organizations. In addition, institutional design has facilitated the election of a large number of ethnic minority candidates to local administration. The voting system in Denmark allows voters to support and cast their preference for specific candidates on the party ballot-slip they vote for; thus immigrant candidates have in many cases gathered large numbers of personalized votes in municipalities with high concentration of ethnic minorities and have secured their election. Furthermore, collective mobilization and the pooling of available resources (financial, political capital, social capital) is easier at the local level thereby resulting in overall higher rates of political participation and representation for ethnic minorities here than at the national level (that obviously requires wider coalitions and networks).

The inclusion of ethnic representatives and organizations at the national level has not been very successful overall. This is due to internal conflicts between migrant organisations and the weak position of the National Council for Ethnic Minorities whose role is essentially restricted to commenting on final policy-proposals on integration issues with little room for meaningful influence.

Informal consultations between ethnic minority representatives and the national political elite is another channel of political representation. Denmark's current government has held a number of very selective, but highly symbolic and publicized consultations with ethnic minority representatives in the presence of the Prime Minister. Invitations to these talks have to a degree been used to 'legitimize' some (invited) representatives over (non-invited) others, privileging some voices within the migrant community in their access to the public sphere and political debate.

**Barriers to Citizenship**

Naturalisation rules in Denmark have been significantly tightened since 2002, creating a steadily growing group of permanently residing non-citizens. Citizenship, and hence the ability to vote in national elections and stand for office, is officially regarded as a prize to be acquired after successful integration. The required period of uninterrupted legal residence has gone up from seven to nine years (eight for refugees). Furthermore, the requirement regarding financial self-support is very strict, and, above all, applicants must pass difficult knowledge and language tests. As a result, a majority of non-western, non-academically qualified immigrants is barred from ever becoming Danish citizens. Second (or third) generation descendants of parents who have not acquired the Danish citizenship must also fulfill these requirements. In addition to this, Denmark, unlike a majority of Western states, does not permit dual citizenship. This poses an obstacle to many immigrants who encounter difficulties in naturalizing or who do not wish to give up their previous citizenship.

## Discursive barriers of participation

Danish public discourse on immigrants and Muslims has been a factor that has discouraged political participation among ethnic minorities. Over the last decade, public debates have focused on Islam's perceived incompatibility with Danish political culture and democracy. This has led to rather common negative stereotypes about Muslim migrants that have resulted in lower levels of participation of ethnic minorities in public debates on political, social and cultural matters (especially when compared to neighbouring Sweden and Britain). Research indicates that the fear of being misinterpreted as "radicals" or "fundamentalists" has limited the participation of moderate and pro-integration Muslim communities in public debates, leading to a disconcerting withdrawal from these voices from the public sphere. This entails a danger that credible alternatives to radical Muslim voices are silenced, and the latter are left unchallenged to dominate the attention of the media and public discourse.

## Recommendations

### Formal political rights and institutionalized opportunities for participation

- **Rules of naturalisation:** Naturalisation requirements should be eased in order to facilitate access to full citizenship rights for permanent, long-term settled minorities, in accordance with a broader EU trend towards liberalization as well as recommendations in the Council of Europe's Convention on Nationality (1997). In particular, the required length of stay should be reduced, the knowledge test and particularly the language test should be designed at realistically achievable levels for applicants, and the space for reasonable exemptions should be widened. In addition, Denmark should accept dual citizenship and embrace *conditional ius soli* (automatic granting of citizenship to descendants of permanent residents). Relatively early, fair, and realistically obtainable citizenship is an incentive towards the mobilization and representation of ethnic minorities at the national level.
- **Local integration councils:** The creation of local integration councils has had an important effect on political participation of ethnic minorities. More than the opportunity given to ethnic minorities to comment on local policy-drafts, it indirectly gives them training platforms and recruitment channels for future ethnic minority candidates. 18% of the ethnic minority candidates that stood for election in 2001 were prior members of local integration councils. Integration councils should be made mandatory and their positions should be elected, and not, as is in some municipalities, through governmental appointment.
- **Council of Ethnic Minorities:** At the national level, ethnic minority input into the political process is unsatisfactory. Strengthening the political consultation role of the Council of Ethnic Minorities is a measure that would increase participation at this level. Including the Council in more preparatory work on policies relating to integration, asylum, social policy, anti-discrimination in all fields especially, would give the very significant message that the Council's work and position is taken seriously by the political elite.

### Barriers to the exercise of formal rights and opportunities

- **Participation in elections:** Research shows that participation in local elections by ethnic minorities in Denmark varies greatly from group to group and from municipality to municipality. Active attempts are required with the aim of developing organizational density among underprivileged minority communities with low political participation, such as the Lebanese and Somali communities. Towards this end, information campaigns on a) the possibilities of establishing ethno-cultural organizations and receiving state funding, and b) the possibilities of running for political offices in the national elections, should be encouraged.
- **Informal consultations:** An important issue regards who is invited for political consultations. Political consultation should be open to a wider range of actors of different views in order to ensure as wide a representation as possible and to avoid excluding and further radicalizing disgruntled actors.
- **Self-organization:** Danish government officials and national politicians lack credible representatives among the migrant community to turn to for advice and consultation on issues pertaining to the integration of ethnic minorities. Ineffective representation of ethnic minority views is partly a product of weak organizations, and ethnic minorities lack national platforms to push claims and relevant viewpoints. Thus, for ethnic minorities to be able to channel their claims and participate or influence the national level of government, they need to organise themselves within umbrella organizations. The Swedish model of providing financial incentives to encourage minority organizations to form larger unions of organizations may be useful here. This would lead to the development of a pool of representatives from umbrella organizations and networks of migrant associations that could be invited to regular meetings with relevant political committees and ministers. At the local level, self-organization could be further developed via established ethnic “entrepreneurs”, who could use their “street credit” in initiating a debate on local matters.
- **Public debates:** Ethnic minority representatives engage in public debates reactively. To engage more proactively and take part in shaping the national debate on matters pertaining to integration and social cohesion requires resources and know-how. Policy makers should consider increasing funding for ethnic minority organizations and media outlets as well as support media training of ethnic minority representatives in order to achieve as wide and democratic a representativeness as possible.

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For more information on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Programme of the European Commission please see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index_en.html)