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## National Identity Crisis: The Intersection of Gender Equality and Ethnic Minority Integration in Denmark

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## 2

# NATIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS: THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND ETHNIC MINORITY INTEGRATION IN DENMARK

**Kristiana Brix**

Like many other European nations, Denmark has struggled to deal with the influx of immigrants that has continued to grow since the 1970s. Priding itself on social unity and universal equality, the small and homogenous Danish state relies so heavily on social consensus that it has struggled to deal with this change both psychologically and institutionally. As a result, discrimination has run rampant in all areas of society, especially in the labor market. What is unique about Denmark's situation, however, is that national identity also has the potential to counterbalance discrimination with specialized policies and programs. The importance of gender equality to Danish national identity offers Denmark such an opportunity to build communication in the 'parallel society.' This paper proposes that the conflict between the maintenance of Danish national identity and the presence of ethnic minorities has the potential to be resolved through engagement of ethnic minority women in the labor market due to this group's ability to free ride off of Danish gender equality norms. This paper acts as an overview of a broader piece concerning the Danish government's use of three platforms of societal participation: legal, political, and economic, to directly affect the way ethnic minority women participate in Danish society. This summary piece explains the main connections between gender in national identity and ethnic minorities in these three platforms of participation in order to show that Danish national identity has unique effects on immigrant integration in Denmark.

## **I. BACKGROUND**

This paper follows immigrant integration from 2001 to the present, which marks the voting in of the conservative coalition government led by the Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen in late 2001. In a February 2009 interview with Denmark's Prime Minister Rasmussen in *Monocle* magazine, the PM emphasized the features that make an 'equality driven' nation such as Denmark complicated—the importance of social consensus. Rasmussen stated in the interview that Denmark is able to maintain a flexible and adaptable economy and society due to "the homogeneity of Danish society,"<sup>1</sup> which essentially implies that those outside of the Danish national consensus are not apart of Danish society,

mainly immigrants and ethnic minorities. This statement is but one sign of how Denmark is struggling to maintain its national identity—not only in a world dominated by the expanding powers of the EU and globalization, but also within its own borders.

The changes in immigration and citizenship policy that quickly followed the installation of the new government in 2001 show how this viewpoint has manifested itself in the numbers. For example, from 2002 to 2003, there was a 77.2% decrease in issued citizenship.<sup>2</sup> The Prime Minister is quick to defend his administration's changes in immigration policy, asserting that though family reunification and asylum immigrants have been reduced to a third of what they were in 2001, persons coming to Denmark to work or study—"people who want to work and contribute"—has tripled.<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister's words are reflective of a general attitude that immigrant values fall outside that of Danish national identity. The importance of those willing to work is also evidence of Denmark's concern for its economy and its shortage of skilled labor.

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index, Denmark has some of the lowest scores in the EU for immigrant labor market access, access to nationality, and anti-discrimination in the period after 2001.<sup>4</sup> Though the Prime Minister presents them as innocent actions of self-interest, the policies themselves reflect a deeper discomfort with *losing Danish consensus*. As the demographic of the nation changes, discrimination and immigration policy are used as the Danish coping mechanism.

## II. ANALYSIS: THREE PLATFORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Discrimination against ethnic minorities in terms of employment and access to citizenship evinces how integration into Danish society for this group is particularly difficult. The next logical question to ask is *in what ways can integration and participation in society be improved?* This paper aims to investigate this question through the use of three approaches to conceptualize social participation through macro-level engagement. This is in contrast to, for example, using ground level social connections to evaluate participation, such as social networking organizations e.g. clubs, unions. Instead, the focus of this analysis is on avenues of participation available through broader institutionalization, i.e. things that can be or are directly controlled by the government. The analysis is broken up into three sections, or platforms of participation: the legal, the political and the economic, which logically reinforce the argument that the labor market offers the most significant evidence of providing effective social integration.

### **Legal**

Legal rights are foundational elements of engagement in a society. Traditionally vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities and women share the need for legislative engagement in order to protect their rights. The legal needs of women and ethnic minorities, respectively, are addressed in legal documents through measures on discrimination and integration. Laws can aim to prevent discrimination or governments can legislate to afford vulnerable groups with certain advantages directly or indirectly. The legal protections and protocols that are briefly discussed in this section cover citizenship, special laws, protocols, and considerations based on gender, and immigrant and ethnic minority status to address participation in society. Through these mechanisms it is evident that ethnic minorities are held back while women are afforded more opportunities legally.

Gender equality laws give a legal base to the institutionalizing of Danish national identity through the labor market. Gender equality legislation in Denmark includes the

following acts:

- Act on Equal Pay (1973, revised 2006)
- Consolidation Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women as regards Access to Employment and Maternity Leave, etc. (1989, revised 2002)
- Act on Equal Treatment of Women and Men in the Occupational Social Security Schemes (1998)
- Act on Gender Equality (2000, revised 2002)

All four of these acts address gender on the basis of discrimination and integration into the economy. Both the Danish constitution and equality laws specifically target the implementation of these laws through both the public and private sectors to better secure the effectiveness of the legislation.<sup>5</sup> This is incredibly important because it shows that labor market functions are perceived to be the most accessible and effective by the Danish government due to the large public sector or welfare economy. Without digging too far into what each law outlines, it is clear that the relationship between gender equality and Danish national identity is fortified through the labor market imperative leading to these legislative actions. The government's extensive gender equality assurances, though not perfect, have provided a legal basis for the national consensus that women's labor force participation is both important and necessary. As a result, modern statistics of women's labor market participation are stable between 76–80%.<sup>6</sup>

Laws pertaining to immigrants and ethnic minority nationals, on the other hand, deter participation in Danish society. As discussed in the background to the analysis, immigration law does its best to execute selective immigration, which systematically excludes non-Westerners as is reinforced in the statistics.<sup>7</sup> Discrimination on the basis of religion and race is illegal in Denmark as legislated by both the Danish constitution and statute. For example, penal code dating back to 1971 declares racism and degradation illegal, however, there are only about two convictions a year.<sup>8</sup> The most important piece of legislation concerning immigrants in Denmark is the Aliens Act, which among other things severely constricts the process of gaining family reunification and limits welfare benefits.<sup>9</sup> As stated in a press release pertaining to the amended Danish Aliens Act (July 1, 2005), "everybody applying for reunification with a spouse or cohabitant (family reunification) in Denmark must sign a declaration confirming that they will make every effort to ensure that they and their children, if any, acquire Danish language skills and become integrated in the Danish society."<sup>10</sup> This clause in particular reflects Denmark's immense preoccupation with retaining Danish national identity and social values. The Aliens Act combines both restrictions as well as mandate for integration that require immigrants to accept Danish national identity and consensus, meanwhile denying full rights under the welfare state and requiring residents to undergo a notoriously tedious naturalization process.

Comparing gender and alien legislation, it is evident that there is a motivation to differentiate those considered to be outsiders in Danish society on a legal level and restrict benefits accordingly. More importantly, the Danish government legislates the universal rights it aims to protect through the welfare state and labor market. This legal base is important in exposing the national-identity-influenced attitudes implicit in government action. The ease at which the government can articulate these attitudes through statutes and thereby affect the everyday lives of citizens and residents confirms the process of differentiating between the insiders and outsiders in Danish society. As this paper moves forward, this differentiation contributes to how ethnic minority women are viewed and addressed.

### **Political**

Political participation is not simply the ability to vote in elections or be elected for public office in a democratic society; political engagement can also be seen in the importance of a group in political discourse, and in the amount of attention the group receives in law and policy and program formation. Switching to a gendered lens, women in Danish society are viewed as both empowered and vulnerable. Women have also become a very important demographic for political parties to consider in both national and EU related issues. Politically speaking, do women and women's issues have any clout? What about immigrant women? This section discovers how Danish national identity affects official discussion of gender and minority women, beginning with Denmark's emphasis on gender mainstreaming and this policy's implications for the way women are addressed. This will be followed by a look at the perceived image of ethnic minority women by the Danish government.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

*Equal representation of women in all areas of political decision-making is not only "fair", but also a possibility for making changes in society. Networking between women's groups and between women politicians is in this respect crucial. The gradual build-up of quantitative and qualitative information as a basis for monitoring and lobbying is equally crucial.<sup>11</sup>*

Denmark's Ministry of Gender spearheads efforts to bring gender mainstreaming into the budgets and policies of all levels of Danish government. Gender mainstreaming simply refers to incorporating gender equality practices into "policies, planning, and administration."<sup>12</sup> This effort was initiated in 2000's Act on Gender Equality, which states that, "Public authorities shall, within their portfolio, work for gender equality and integrate gender equality in all planning and administration (mainstreaming)."<sup>13</sup> Gender mainstreaming is part of a "proactive approach" to attack barriers to gender equality, aiming to prevent escalated situations of gender divisions due to policy.<sup>14</sup> These goals were put into place with 2001's Inter-ministerial Gender Mainstreaming Project. As a result of the project, all policies must be analyzed for their potential impacts on gender equality as part of this initiative. The extensiveness of the project requires that "the 18 portfolio ministers hold the responsibility for integrating the gender and gender equality perspective in their own policy areas."<sup>15</sup> This political drive to address gender equality at the root of policy emphasizes the importance of universal equality in Danish national identity and values. The 2001 implementation date for the inter-ministry program reflects the politicization of national identity that is representative of the new government coalition's conservative values and emphasis on maintaining Danish identity.

### **Ethnic minority women as stereotypes**

*However, in its work the Ministry does try to empower ethnic minority women on the basis of their special situation and needs, so as to create increased gender equality among ethnic minorities.*

-Ministry of Gender (Ligestillingsafdelingen), Denmark<sup>16</sup>

The language used in the above quote, which highlights a "special situation" for ethnic minority women, begs the question of what it is exactly that Danes and the Danish gov-

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ernment think of ethnic minority women. Trude Langvasbraten's analysis of Scandinavian gender equality policies shows that in recent years the Danish government has explicitly outlined in gender policy a conflict between multiculturalism and gender equality.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the Danish government has identified non-Western women as a particularly vulnerable group. Policy documents such as those put out by the Ministry of Gender cite domestic violence and labor market participation as the two most important factors that inform the agency of ethnic minority women.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis of these two factors, i.e. violence and market participation, suggests that the Danish government assumes that many immigrant cultures foster violence and debasing of women, which prevents minority women from exercising agency in society and the economy.

*In short, the welfare systems are such that once a refugee from, for example, Somalia is accepted into the country, he is entitled to receive (almost) all the benefits of the welfare state, even if a couple of years of hard work is needed before he can start even to aspire to a job allowing him to contribute to the welfare state. The same applies to his wife, who is in purdah and never ventures outside their home without being covered in a full chador.<sup>19</sup>*

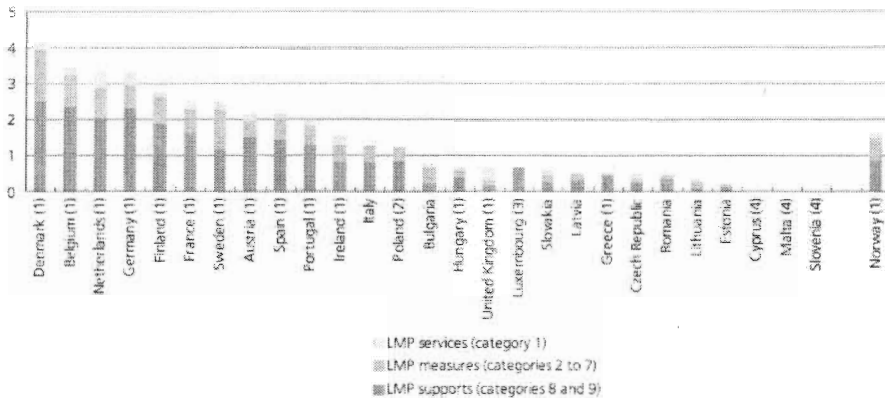
Stemming from Denmark's touting of its gender equality narrative and efforts, it tends to be the common view that ethnic minority women, specifically those of Islamic faith, are suppressed and victimized. This viewpoint does a few things. First, it propels the view that Danish and immigrant cultures are irreconcilably different due to differing gender equality norms. It also criminalizes minorities as culturally violent. Finally, this view sets up ethnic minority women as a vulnerable demographic with specific needs for outreach. As a result, Denmark has a number of different domestic violence programs that emphasize statistics showing that ethnic minority women are the greatest victims of domestic violence in Denmark.

The combination of victimizing ethnic minority women and institutionalizing gender equality through gender mainstreaming reveals how the perceived vulnerability of women based on ethnic and cultural background is reflected in the way in which these demographics are discussed and addressed. As a result, ethnic minorities are othered, which has a direct effect on how they are perceived and treated in society. This is especially the case of the labor market.

### **Economic**

Denmark had very little employment growth leading up to this period (negative or 0 for the years 2000, 2001, 2002),<sup>20</sup> yet unemployment has consistently decreased every year since 2000,<sup>21</sup> allowing Denmark to maintain one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU. In order for these two phenomena to happen concurrently, there needs to be some sort of state involvement.

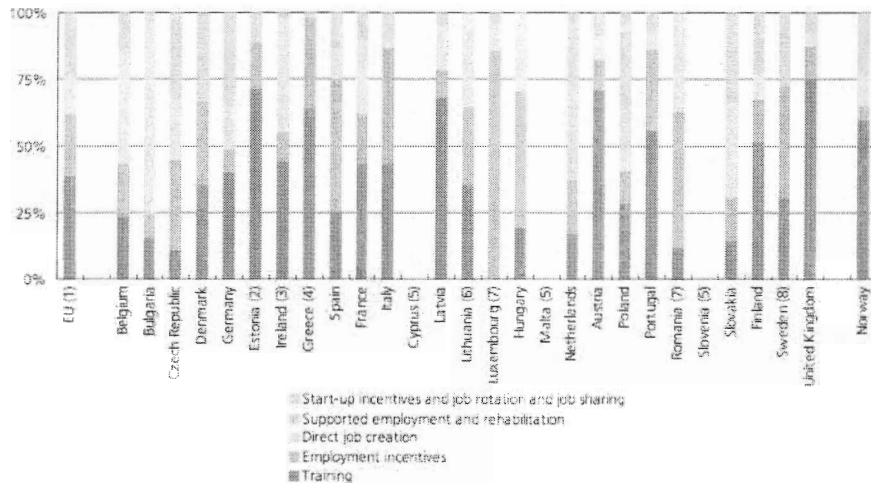
Figure 5.18: Public expenditure on labour market policy interventions, 2005  
(% of GDP)



- (1) Estimates.
- (2) Not available for category 1.
- (3) Not available for categories 1-7.
- (4) Not available.

Source: Eurostat (lmp\_expsumn)

Figure 5.20: Expenditure on labour market policy measures, 2005  
(%)



- (1) Based on data available for the Member States.
- (2) Supported employment and rehabilitation, not applicable.
- (3) Start-up incentives & job rotation and job sharing, not applicable.
- (4) Direct job creation and supported employment and rehabilitation, not applicable.
- (5) Not available.
- (6) Training, not available.
- (7) Supported employment and rehabilitation; job rotation and job sharing, not applicable.
- (8) Direct job creation, not applicable.

Source: Eurostat (tps0077)

Both figures from Eurostat<sup>22</sup>

The two graphs shown here (from Europe in Figures 2008) illustrate Denmark's labor market expenditure and allocation for 2005. Denmark tops the EU for expenditure (with 1.6% of GDP in 2005),<sup>23</sup> which is divided approximately three ways between employment incentives, training, and supported employment and rehabilitation. This reveals that Denmark is concerned about maintaining a thriving economy. Denmark maintains a stridently liberal business policy to balance welfare economy<sup>24</sup> by implementing methods that reward private business growth, as seen in Figure 5.20. Immigrant labor market integration programs also receive significant funding. Building from the previous two sections in which law and politics have created barriers by limiting rights and pigeon holing minorities with social stigma, labor market policy centers on *active engagement* of ethnic minorities with the Danish majority. Therefore, Denmark's emphasis on labor market programs as part of the integration scheme warrants serious consideration.

### *Integration Programs: Taking Steps to Bridge the Gap*

According to OECD, "Between 2007 - 2011, the Danish Government is implementing a program with 11 initiatives to strengthen the possibilities for immigrant women to work and to participate in education and/or activities of associations."<sup>25</sup> Denmark has implemented new immigrant integration methods since the takeover of the conservative coalition in 2001. The Ministry of Integration set aside 12.4 million DKK (about 2.25 mil USD) for programs to promote the employment of immigrants in 2006.<sup>26</sup> These programs, though different in many ways, share a fundamental feature that ultimately relates to national identity—network building. Programs featuring mentorship, education, training, and job fairs all hinge on creating better connections and building mutual understanding between ethnic minorities and native Danes. This strategy aims to bring ethnic minorities into the workforce by narrowing the space between the two parallel societies. The idea is to build connections for ethnic minorities in Danish networks, thereby connecting the ethnic minority community to the Danish community. Networking is particularly salient because of the necessary social understandings that are implicit in establishing good relations with others in a community.

As cited by a report done by Julie Kundby Eriksen and Inger Marie Kærgaard through the National Agency for European Educational Programme in 2007, there are 98 municipalities engaged in "introduction" programs for newly arrived immigrants and 91 local job centers.<sup>27</sup> Specific types of integration programmes include mentorship, language courses, and job fairs. Though proportionally small in scale, the potential growth seen in many of these programs is incredible.<sup>28</sup>

The approaches of the programs themselves reveal a lot about the motivations behind them. Denmark has specifically outlined a set of steps for program utilization as a direct path for integration.

**First step:** *Intensive language training and introduction to the labour market.*

**Second Step:** *Company-based training (+ language training/skills upgrading).*

**Third Step:** *Employment with wage subsidies to employer (+ language training/*



*skills upgrading*).<sup>29</sup>

There are various programs run by different organizations and municipalities that play into this larger system of “steps” towards integration into Danish society. Again, it is also important to note that this is a labor market-based integration system. These factors are important to understanding how networking is a representative part of the process for connecting immigrants with Danish national identity in the specific program types.

To show the emphasis of women in these projects, it is important to note that all of the types provide some kind of mechanism or mention of connecting ethnic minority women to the labor market. The Danish government is making a concerted effort to target ethnic minority women in this fashion, implicitly evoking Danish national identity through building relationships between ethnic minority women and the Danish society and economy through these programs. The way in which these programs strive to both empower and assimilate shows the unique role of ethnic minority women as bearers of culture between the parallel Danish societies.

### *Signs of Success*

The impact of the explicit targeting of ethnic minority women is only evident indirectly due to the lack of broad sweeping research due to the fact that the programs themselves are often too recent or ongoing. There is other evidence, in terms of labor market participation statistics, however, that show that ethnic minority women are gaining ground.

**Table 1: Labour force characteristics of the native- and foreign-born populations, 15-64 years old, selected OECD countries, 2005/2004 average**

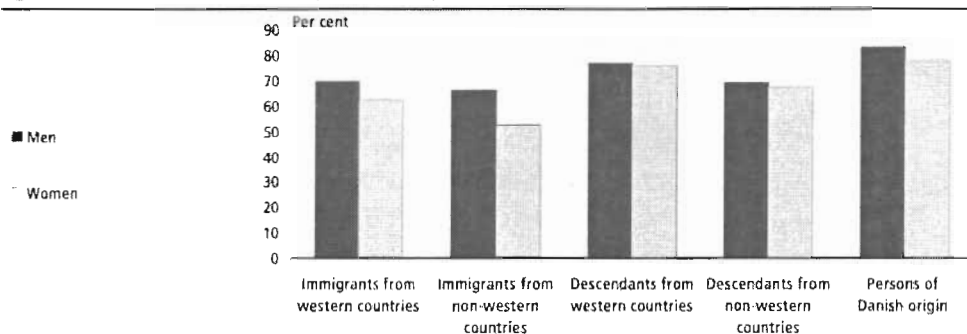
	Participation rate		Employment rate		Unemployment rate		
	Native-born	Foreign-born	Native-born	Foreign-born	Native-born	Foreign-born	Ratio
<b>Men</b>							
Australia	85.3	79.9	80.5	75.5	5.6	5.5	1.0
Belgium	73.2	71.3	68.8	60.7	5.9	14.9	2.5
Canada	83.2	83.2	78.6	77.7	5.5	6.6	1.2
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>2.6</b>
– <i>OECD</i>		<b>78.8</b>		<b>72.9</b>		<b>7.5</b>	<b>1.8</b>
<i>foreign-born</i>							
– <i>Non-OECD</i>		<b>70.2</b>		<b>59.5</b>		<b>15.3</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<i>foreign-born</i>							
France	74.9	77.0	68.9	66.6	8.0	13.4	1.7
Germany	79.9	79.0	71.6	64.9	10.5	17.9	1.7
Netherlands	84.8	77.3	81.8	68.7	3.6	11.1	3.1
Norway	82.1	77.1	78.6	68.8	4.2	10.7	2.5
Sweden	81.7	75.9	76.0	65.0	7.0	14.4	2.1
United Kingdom	81.9	78.3	78.0	72.6	4.7	7.4	1.6
United States	78.4	85.2	73.0	80.2	6.9	5.8	0.8
<b>Women</b>							
Australia	69.9	60.4	65.9	57.0	5.7	5.6	1.0
Belgium	60.3	48.0	55.8	39.4	7.5	17.8	2.4
Canada	72.5	68.9	68.9	64.2	4.9	6.8	1.4
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>76.9</b>	<b>61.0</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>2.2</b>
– <i>OECD</i>		<b>66.7</b>		<b>61.5</b>		<b>7.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<i>foreign-born</i>							
– <i>Non-OECD</i>		<b>55.9</b>		<b>47.6</b>		<b>15.0</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<i>foreign-born</i>							
France	64.9	58.1	58.4	48.4	9.6	16.7	1.7
Germany	67.8	56.2	61.1	47.3	9.9	15.8	1.6
Netherlands	71.5	57.0	68.3	51.3	4.4	10.1	2.3
Norway	75.9	66.1	72.9	61.1	4.0	7.6	1.9
Sweden	78.0	68.5	72.8	59.9	6.6	12.5	1.9
United Kingdom	69.6	59.8	66.9	55.5	3.8	7.2	1.9
United States	69.2	60.3	65.4	56.2	5.5	5.8	1.1

from the OECD<sup>30</sup>

The chart shows that all parties (including OECD immigrant men and women as well as non-OECD men) have higher participation rates than non-OECD women (ethnic minority women). Though the chart shows that ethnic minority women, overall, participate less in the economy, there is a smaller gap between women participating in the labor market and those who are actually employed than there is for men. Also of note, ethnic minority women experience a lower unemployment rate than ethnic minority men overall. This insinuates that these women are benefiting in some way from labor market institutions. Other evidence of effective targeting of ethnic minority women is in the comparison between non-Western immigrants and descendants. As seen in the graph below, the activity gap between men and

women greatly shrinks from one generation to the next for non-Western women, though descendants still tend to benefit less from education than natives. Day-care attendance of children of immigrants increased by 50% in the period of 2002-2007, a sign that immigrant women have greater access to and are utilizing government programs that connect them with jobs, training, and childcare (an institution that is highly state-controlled).<sup>31</sup>

Figure 2 Activity rate of immigrants and their descendants, 2007



from the Danish Statistical Yearbook 2008<sup>32</sup>

The combination of the government's willingness to target ethnic minority women in the programs combined with the numerical signs of success leads to a conclusion that ethnic minority women offer a potentially explosive opportunity for the Danish integration regime. When one considers national identity in terms of gender equality it becomes evident that the Danes have an incredible incentive and capability institutionally speaking to target ethnic minority women as the bearers of identity. Returning to the three-pronged frame of mind in which legal, political, and economic agendas dictate societal participation, the Danish government's ability to *actively engage* the population is through the labor market.

### III. CONCLUSION

Denmark sees ethnic minority women differently and as a result these women gain certain advantages over men in terms of programs and access. By stepping back and viewing gender policy and integration as symptomatic of broad societal needs, it becomes evident that using a gendered lens may be a helpful tool to tackling Denmark's integration issue. The legal, political, and economic engagement of women and ethnic minorities categorizes the Danish concern with preserving national identity in such a way that it becomes evident that gender is a viable tool for integration. Denmark already invests considerable resources and sensitivity to women's economic integration. The state, therefore, already has the working knowledge and motivation to target ethnic minority women. This allows for ethnic minority women to essentially free ride on the already established gender equality norms of Denmark. As seen in the general statistical information provided on the gains made by ethnic minority women in Danish society, it is clear that programs that target this demographic have incred-

ible potential, whereas legal and political perception of ethnic minority women is limiting. Denmark should expand its pursuit of ethnic minority women in integration efforts because they have shown themselves to be an important bridge between the immigrant and native populations. This also reveals potential for other European nations struggling with immigrant integration. If Denmark's strength is in working with women to bridge social gaps, what could be the strengths of countries such as Germany or Spanish that could potentially be leveraged to foster integration?

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