

Employing a worker with a poor command of the national language

Communication arguments

For refugees and immigrants to be employed in a company, the level of national language skills is often considered the greatest challenge. In order to overcome this barrier it is important for the newcomer to continuously progress and learn the language also when being employed. However, there are also ways to raise awareness to the possibility of employing workers without adequate language skills.

In a Danish context, employment of a worker with level A1 language skills (or lower) is not very common. To be employed in Denmark, it is most often necessary to have at least a certain level of Danish (or English) language skills, and persons with limited language skills often struggle to find employment in Denmark.

During the last couple of years, however, the Danish economy has been in a very good shape, meaning that employers in many industries are having a hard time finding qualified and motivated personnel. In some cases, employers have expressed that all that they can now require from staff is that they have two arms, two legs, and that they are motivated and able to meet on time. At the moment, many employers are thus compelled to hire personnel without the language skills that they would otherwise demand.

In order to do this, the employers need some tools.

When talking with employers from different industries, many of them suggest that looking into the resources of already employed staff – e.g. exploring if any of them has relevant language competences – is a tool in hiring new personnel with limited Danish or English skills.

For instance, in a large hotel based in Copenhagen, they have employed a former refugee, Allan, to be a mentor for all new staff with Danish as a foreign language. Allan speaks 7 different languages, and because of this, he is able to communicate with most of the new staff in their native language.

ISS, a large Danish enterprise working with facility management, has used the same strategy. When hiring staff with limited Danish or English language skills, they link the newly hired person with already employed staff speaking the same language. In this way, some of the large enterprises in Denmark work around the barriers that exist because of limited language skills.



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