

A short report on
First Green Card Conference
16th December 2010
Crowne Plaza Hotel Copenhagen.



Hosted and supported by Confederation of Danish industry
In corporation with Danish Green Card Association



Confederation of Danish Industry



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The first Green Card Conference was held on 16th Dec 2010 in Copenhagen to address issues related to green card holders. It was organized and hosted by Confederation of Danish industry in collaboration (DI) with Danish Green Card Association (DGCA). Conference was attended by green card holders, special guest, and speakers including: Claus Andersen Advisor DI, Marianne Hansen CEO Work in Denmark, Özlem G. Akar Special advisor Udlændingesservice, David Hedegaard Andersen Advisor Rambøll, Dr. Athar Javed Expert on South Asian Affairs, Martin Steen Kabongo Chief advisor DI, Morten Østergaard Member of the Danish parliament Danish Social Liberal-Party, Zeshan Jaffari Green card Holder, Nina Middelboe Oxford Research, Maria Nørby The National Labour Market Authority, Finn Krogh Jørgensen The Danish Society of Engineers, Dennis Nørmark Living Institute, Kim Lunding Ministry of Refugee Immigration and Integration Affairs, Aamir Sohail Chairman Danish Green Card Association.

Claus Andersen (Advisor, DI), In his opening speech Claus mention the future needs of Danish industries for high skilled immigrants. He described the effort of DI to attracting high skilled labour to Denmark.

Marianne Hansen (CEO, Work in Denmark) explained the facilitation provided by workinDenmark website for job search. She also discussed following points in her speech.

- . This service provides a database of English jobs for foreign workers
- . They also provide career coaching for free
- . They arrange career fairs
- . This organization is running by the government
- . They will be a part of the citizen service station, which will be open in the start of 2011
- . They also provide employers with a database of foreign skilled individuals who register their CVs

Özlem G. Akar (Special advisor, Udlændingesservice), As a representative of immigration office Akar presented the rules and regulations of green card visa. His presentation was helpful to clarify the confusion regarding visa policies particularly related to visa extension.

Dr. Athar Javed (Expert on South Asian Affairs, Copenhagen University), stressed that Danish Green Card (DGC) holders have been investing golden period of their lives in Denmark. So Danish Government and DGC holders should concentrate to find the solutions instead of blaming each other.

Pointing out some hurdles at both ends he mentioned, the government is causing hurdle by not allowing DGCs holders to start their own businesses like software houses or consultancy firms etc. On the other side he said DGCs holders should also be more active in learning the

language and integrate in the society.

He suggested that there should be some mechanism where DGCs Visa Applicant can start learning Danish language while their visa application is being processed. An online portal might help applicants to have an idea about Danish language before they come to Denmark. In the end he insisted that such events should be conducted on regular basis to initiate the debate related to DGCs holders' problems and finally to come up with the solutions.

Morten Østergaard from Danish Social Liberal-Party also addressed the conference. Sharing his party's point of view on attracting foreign labour, Martin said that aging population, shortage of skilled labour and need to have better ties with emerging markets of the world are main reasons for their support for easy and simple policies to attract foreign professionals. He further mentioned that there needs to be a lot of improvement done in the public sector for acceptance of foreign professionals. According to him Denmark faces a tough competition from English countries.

"Simpler policies, help in integration through social networks and English as a language of choice in public offices are some suggestions", he said.

He also said that a lot of change in rules must be stopped and 18 changes in 9 years for family reunification rules is not an ideal example to follow in our policies.

Answering a question related to changes in Danish Green Card scheme's duration from 3 years to one and half year and then again 3 years, he said we (Danish Social Liberal-Party) are there to make sure that we protect the agreement and that is the reason why they had to move back from the change.

Zeeshan Jaffari, a Danish Green Card (DGC)holder, shared his experience of Denmark and job search. A graduate from KTH, Stockholm and having extensive work experience in Canada and different countries, its been 6 months that he is searching job in Denmark and did not get any success. He further mentioned the issues faced by many DGC holders and said,

" We do not know how to break the shell and get into the social network of Danes and also the frequent changes in the policies by the government, makes us more insecure"

He suggested that there should be an effort to arrange conferences and job fairs exclusively for Danish Green Card (DGC) holders to enhance the awareness level among the employers. He mentioned that it seems most of the employers do not even know about DGC Scheme. Another suggestion was to arrange some special internship programs for DGC holders so that they have a chance to enter in the job market and prove their skills.

"An internship program can be the win-win situation, both for companies and DGC holders" He stressed.

Finally he said that another suggestion is to allow them for starting their own businesses. It would not be an ideal policy to prevent someone from creating some new jobs in a recession time and if someone have a brilliant idea then it should not be wasted just because he is not allowed to start a business.

Nina Middleboe (Oxford Research) shared some interesting statistics from expat study 2010. She mentioned that according to the study, the biggest strength of Denmark is the Danish work culture which allows a balance between work and family life. Study also shows that majority of expats (69%) says that its difficult to socialize in Denmark. It was also notable that integration remains correlated with Danish language skills.

Dennis Nørmark from Living Institute, shared his expert opinion on Danish society and how to avoid being a stranger in Denmark. He said that integration is a two way process and expats should know the reason behind apparently strange behavior of Danish people. According to him the rationale behind Danes being “weired” or strange for most of the expats is way deep in the history. He further explained that historically Denmark has lost a lot of land and it has become a small country now. The historical events and specially catastrophe of 1864 has pushed Danes to be more internally connected. The good part of this is the trust in society and family is first in Danish culture. The negative side is that almost 66% of Danes have low cultural competence.

He further suggested actions for both sides, Danes and expats. According to him Danes should have to be more welcoming and less shy for foreigners. The should also understand that foreign skilled professionals can enhance their knowledge. For expats he suggested that they should know the culture and shouldn't act like a stranger. Respect formalities, follow suit and get the interpretation right were some of the other tips by him.

Aamir Sohail (Chairman, DGCA) said that this conference is great success as green card holders managed to convey their issues to authorities, and all speakers were very concerned about the situation of GCHs. This activity is a first step to address, and solve our issues. Hopefully we will make this conference as annual event.

Panel Discussion (Panelists: Maria Nørby, Dennis Nørmark, Fin Krogh, Kim Lunding)

The panelists concluded the discussion by sharing their point of views related to challenges and opportunities. Maria Nørby, from The National Labour Market Authority, said that Denmark's image needs to be improved internationally and the strong points like best family life should be displayed to attract high skilled professionals. She stressed that at the same time we should not give a false image as the recession has slowed down the growth and opportunities are limited now. She further mentioned that recession should also not create an impression for authorities to stop the immigration because Denmark needs immigrants to sustain its social system due to aging population and many other aspects.

Fin Krogh, from The Danish Society of Engineers, said that a biggest challenge for Denmark is the competition from English speaking countries.

“The main focus for Danish Green Card Scheme was to provide a pool of skilled labour for Danish companies to choose from”, said Kim Lunding from Ministry of Refugee, Immigration

and Integration Affairs.

After the comprehensive information in the seminar the panel discussion attracted relatively fewer questions.

Q. Why DGC holders are not allowed to do business and create more jobs?

A. The basic intention behind DGC scheme was to create a larger pool of skilled labour for Danish industry to choose from and not to have new businesses. The rules can change in the future but for the time being they are not allowed to do business.

Q. Is there any proper plan to arrange more job fairs specifically for DGC holders and enhance the awareness level of DGC scheme among Danish employers?

A. Work in Denmark is already working on it and Danish Industry can also further help DGC holders to arrange similar conferences in the future.

Conference Outcomes:

Realization of GCHs situation

We are able to convey our problems to authorities through this conference. They realized the situation of GCHs.

Clarity of visa policies

Confusions of GCHs regarding green card scheme are clarified.

Internship Program, and Jobfair

DGCA will soon start working on internship program and jobfair for GCHs in collaboration with DI, Work in Denmark and other organization.

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