

# An expat perspective: Are Danes open to foreigners living in Denmark?

A survey by Worktrotter DK



1. December, 2010  
Dagmar Fink, Worktrotter

Worktrotter DK ApS

Dagmar Fink

<http://www.worktrotter.dk>

[contact@worktrotter.dk](mailto:contact@worktrotter.dk)



## Contents

About Worktrotter DK.....	2
Why this survey?.....	4
Important information .....	6
Survey .....	7
Survey methodology.....	7
Set up of the survey.....	8
Survey results .....	9
Assessment by various circumstances .....	11
By length of stay in Denmark.....	11
By place of residence in Denmark .....	13
By education level .....	15
By country of origin.....	17
The 5 Main Challenges .....	22
Social interaction.....	22
Government and authorities .....	24
Media .....	26
Language.....	27
Being treated as equal .....	28
Summary.....	30



## About Worktrotter DK

Before we go into the details about the survey, let me first introduce myself:

I moved to Denmark in 2006 to live with my Danish partner and work for IBM Denmark. I had previously worked at IBM Germany, IBM U.S.A, and for Mercedes Benz Research. When the question came up where to build our common home, we decided to give Denmark a try and see if it was the right place for both of us. Love is a good motivator for change, but I would not have moved to a new country if I didn't feel that I would have equally good career opportunities there.

For the last 10 years I have worked in innovative areas in software development and services for IBM, of which I spent the last eight years in leadership positions as a business, people and project manager. When working in the area of innovation one is constantly confronted with problems where no solutions are available yet. One always experiences the unknown when going into new business fields. I felt the discussion around integration was similar. The challenges for successful integration are many and there are problems we don't yet have a solution for. These aspects have motivated me to use some of my energy to focus on certain integration questions, and has prompted me to create Worktrotter. The focus of Worktrotter DK is on well-educated foreigners and international professionals in Denmark because back in 2006 not much existed for this group of people. They were considered integrated by default because the government felt that if they had an education, most of them had a job and knew English so communication was no problem.

Because the word "foreigner" can have a negative association to it due to the ongoing cultural and integration issues, I created the word "Worktrotter" to give us the opportunity to deal with the integration questions in a less biased way. This word was chosen in accordance to the well-known word "Globetrotter". Globetrotters travel the world for the thrill of the adventure. Worktrotters do it for work reasons.

At the center of Worktrotter DK there are two large international networks: Worktrotter, which was founded in 2006, and ForeignersInDenmark, started in 2007 by Paula Jota Pedersen from Brazil. In 2010 the two organizations joined forces. The two Websites <http://www.Worktrotter.dk> and <http://www.ForeignersInDenmark.dk> are well known and frequently visited by foreigners. Google analytics shows more than 35,000 visits and 150,000 page-views per month. There are currently more than 6,000 members in both networks combined, and as a result we can reach a large number of people in the international community in Denmark and many Website visitors from abroad.

The Worktrotter and ForeignersInDenmark networks have international members and families of expats, as well as many Danes. There is a wide diversity of people among the international members. Some are sent by their company to work in Denmark for a short-medium time, some have chosen Denmark to study or work for a longer period, some relocate due to having a Danish partner, and yet others are in the process of considering moving to Denmark. As about 90 percent of our members have a higher level of education, we focus on their needs and experiences due to the fact that this group is still not very visible in integration discussions.



Having lived in Germany, Romania, Sweden and the U.S.A before moving to Denmark, I consider myself a Worktrotter. I went through the ups and downs of culture shock after moving here and looked for ways of making the settling process easier. First, when moving to another country it is of central importance to meet people. So, I started the Worktrotter network to give people the possibility to meet others. We also set up meetings with specific topics varying from socializing in Danish (“Vi taler Dansk”), to holding seminars covering practical topics like taxes and housing. Other topics have covered cultural aspects like social interaction and workplace culture in Denmark, as well as professional ones like how to run your own business and network with others. In all our meetings we have made it a priority to involve experts in the various fields of interest and include both Danes *and* foreigners as speakers. This aspect is still very uncommon i.e., to involve foreigners in activities *for* foreigners in spite of the wide range of knowledge and expertise in the international community.

In the many discussions about people’s lives and experiences in Denmark, I found that a great number of people are fighting with similar challenges – a terrible waste of energy and expertise, to solve similar difficulties time and time again. We can do smarter things than re-invent the wheel, right?

This was what drove me to write “The Worktrotter’s Guide to Denmark,” <http://www.worktrotter.dk/guide>, a detailed, practical handbook with 330 pages of information to help foreigners navigate their way through the Danish system. The book is written from the angle of foreigners and nearly 1,500 newcomers have already benefited from having it as a resource.

Considering the large base of members and Website visitors, Worktrotter DK wants to give foreigners a voice so they can be heard, and support them in their ongoing debates on how to make things better. It is an organization with the aim of assisting foreigners and making the good work being conducted *by* foreigners, *with* foreigners and *for* foreigners more visible.



## Why this survey?

Worktrotter DK's approach is to look at Denmark from the angle of foreigners. How do they see Denmark? What challenges do they have? How can they be solved? What solutions have others in the community found? Last but not least: How can we benefit from the knowledge of foreigners *and* Danes, and Danes *and* foreigners – important aspects to consider when it comes to integration.

In the many discussions I have had with foreigners as part of my role in leading activities aimed at cultural integration in Denmark, I got the impression more and more that certain challenges have not really been explored yet. It is well-known that well-educated foreigners often leave Denmark due to not being fully capable of settling properly. The reason usually mentioned is that they have a strong difficulty in becoming a part of the community, and building a social network. Families become isolated and are unable to find their "place" here.

However, many people mentioned that not only do they struggle with integrating they also feel that they are not wanted in the country. That was the trigger to look more closely into this topic and served as the motivation for conducting this survey.

Foreigners living in Denmark are obviously not Danish and therefore they can be seen as being only guests here. It is not their country, even if they contribute in the same way Danes do. We often get the impression that there is a general attitude of: "If they don't like to be here, they can leave," and many do (see "The Expat study, 2006. Udenlandske videnarbejdere i Danmark. By Oxford Research in cooperation with The Copenhagen Post). However, considering the many discussions about Denmark needing a highly skilled workforce from abroad, it is worth looking at the related challenges and then propose solutions on what can be done about them. There is already a shortage of highly qualified labor, and with the slow growth forecast respectively reduction in workforce in the coming years, Denmark needs foreign talent in order to remain competitive, yet the country has the problem of retaining these people.

It is our opinion that if no action is taken, Denmark will potentially lose out economically.

First, people that don't feel welcome will search for other places where the atmosphere is better for them. People with a good education and professional experience have the choice because their skills are needed in many other countries. If they leave, Denmark loses their knowledge and experience. Executing work and developing products and services may take longer or it might not be possible at all. However their influence doesn't stop with these people leaving the country. Many times they spread the word of their experience and are potentially influencing others not to come.

Secondly, these people are all ambassadors for or against Denmark when it comes to corporate spending. Many of the well-educated people are decision makers or are advisors to decision makers. They come to consider which country to invest in, to start new projects in, with whom to start cooperations with, and what products and services to use. This is what globalization is about. If people have good experiences, Denmark can be in the running and be more competitive, and new jobs can be created here. However, if experiences are not positive, this will not happen. Thus Denmark will miss out on prospects and jobs, as well as tax money and foreign investment.



As a third consequence it can also affect tourism, an important industry in Denmark. Foreigners have friends abroad with whom they stay in touch. Also in this sense they will act as ambassadors for or against Denmark. They will relay their experiences to their friends, which again have their network of friends. So, information travels long distances in a very short time and will influence decisions that can also have a big impact.

This publication presents the results of the survey entitled, "Do you perceive Danes as being open to foreigners living in Denmark?". The main intention of the survey was to determine if the related experiences of not feeling welcome were singular and only the experience of a few or if it is the experience of many. By examining the experience of a large number of people it is my hope that problems can be identified and solutions found to help bridge the gap between Danes and the international community. While such a study could encompass all foreigners in Denmark, such a wide scope was not possible. It also turned out that due to the channels used for spreading information about the survey the respondents were mainly well-educated foreigners that come to Denmark to work or to build a home here with their Danish partner.

The results of the survey give a strong signal that there is in fact a problem of foreigners not having a general *feeling* of being wanted here. The majority of the Danish people may not be aware that their behavior towards foreigners might give such a different impression than how it is intended. This is one aim of the survey – to make such discrepancies better known.

Not feeling wanted is not only unpleasant in general, it has the consequence that it strongly influences foreigners to leave the country (and many are leaving), thereby having serious consequences for Denmark and its economy, not to mention the people that uproot their lives and move due to the circumstances. It is my hope that the results of this survey start a thought process and a dialog that can lead to solutions so that foreigners living in the country can make a home here and Denmark can benefit from their contributions.

Openness, friendliness, "hygge", and treating people equally is the Danish way.

Or do we have to say "was" the Danish way? Considering the results of the survey, many foreigners don't seem to experience these Danish qualities.

Hopefully they will not get lost in the current focus of protecting Denmark.

**Best regards,**

**Dagmar Fink**

**- Worktrotter DK -**



## Important information

This survey is not about finger-pointing, nor about discussing if Denmark is a good or a bad place to live. Denmark is as good a place as many others. The results of the survey are about highlighting challenges that are worth looking at in order to improve the foreigner's experience here for the benefit of both themselves and Denmark.

It is important to also note that we don't seek preferential treatment by separating highly educated vs. less educated people, westerners vs. non-westerners. We would appreciate, if the political and public discussion about foreigners were more balanced. Currently the focus is almost exclusively on "problem" cases, on foreigners that don't want to integrate, don't have a higher education or don't have work. Considering how much weight these aspects have in the integration discussions, they misrepresent reality. Many foreigners don't fall into this "problem" category. Many are strong contributors to the Danish welfare state, have learned the language and are well integrated in the society. Where are they in the discussions about foreigners?

The survey is also not about judging if things are done right or wrong. We want to take a forward, solution-oriented approach: *What* are the problems exactly, and *How* can certain challenges be solved such that both Danes and foreigners can have a good life in Denmark and give their best for the benefit of us all.



## Survey

### Survey methodology

This survey was conducted as part of Worktrotter DK's activities in assisting foreigners with integration issues, and is based on voices and opinions of the international community, and specifically the perception that they don't feel welcome. As mentioned earlier the survey is intended to determine if the experiences relayed were singular or if they represented a more general experience.

In order to include a varied range of survey participants, a wide variety of channels in the international community were used. Due to cost constraints information about the survey was submitted online only. By doing so it is fully understood that we only reached members of the international community that are active on the Internet and in the international groups. However, we succeeded in reaching a large and varied enough group to achieve representative results. In the future, follow-up surveys may be conducted in order to reach a wider number of people or other relevant groups by using traditional media as well.

Information about the survey was sent to members of the Worktrotter and ForeignersinDenmark network totaling at that point to over 5,400 people. In addition, expat groups on Facebook, LinkedIn, and meetup.com, as well as public and private international networks including those in large Danish companies were also included. It was important for us to reach a wide variety of people with diverse backgrounds and multiple nationalities. The intention of the survey was to gain an as varied view as possible on Denmark and to obtain representative results.

From the size of the networks approached, it is estimated that information about the survey could have reached approximately 10,000 people. There were a total of 703 survey participants, which matches common average participation-ratios in surveys.

The survey was conducted using [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), a common and well-known tool for running powerful surveys via the Internet, used also by large companies like Facebook and Xerox for their customer satisfaction assessments. For each survey participant, surveymonkey saves the participant answers as well as the IP address of the computer from which the survey was taken. This can help in taking precautions to not have participants complete the survey several times and as such distort the results. In total a number of 54 entries were found that had duplicate IPs, of which 14 entries gave a strong indication that the survey had been taken twice because the assessment was identical and similar comments had been given. These 14 entries have been ruled out. The others were kept in the survey because, upon assessment, they differed from each other and the comments contained different content and used a different writing style. It was concluded that the participants must have taken the surveys from publicly accessible computers, like e.g. from PCs at a language school or a library.

When developing the survey, it was important that it be written in a simple manner. We have introduced an open question where the participants could enter comments. Such, we can find out aspects we are not aware of and also identify those aspects that are high on people's minds about their life in Denmark.



## Set up of the survey

Title: Do you perceive Danes as being open to foreigners living in Denmark?

Question 1:

Do you perceive Danes as being open to foreigners living in Denmark?

5 choices as radio buttons: Very much so / In general yes / Kind of / Not really / Not at all

Question 2:

What situations and experiences do you base your assessment on? Please give some examples.

This was a comment text field of unlimited length. 74 percent gave comments.

Question 3:

How long have you lived in Denmark?

5 choices as radio buttons: 0-1 year / 1-3 years / 3-5 years / 5-10 years/ over 10 years

Question 4:

Where do you live in Denmark?

5 choices as radio buttons: Hovedstaden (capital) / Zealand /Northern Jutland / Mid Jutland / Southern Denmark

Question 5:

What is your educational background?

3 choices as radio buttons: Long education / medium-length education / shorter education

Question 6:

What country do you originate from?

Text field of unlimited length

Question 7:

Space for more comments.

Text field of unlimited length. 31percent have used this field to give more comments

The survey ran from June to August 2010, and we could clearly see that many had accepted the Danish way of life and where on vacation in July.

In total 703 participants answered the survey.



## Survey results

The results of the main question (questions nr 1): “Do you perceive Danes as being open to foreigners living in Denmark?” is displayed in the chart below.

“Very much so” was answered by 5%, “In general, yes” by 21%, “Kind of” by 28%, “Not really” by 34% and “Not at all” by 12%.

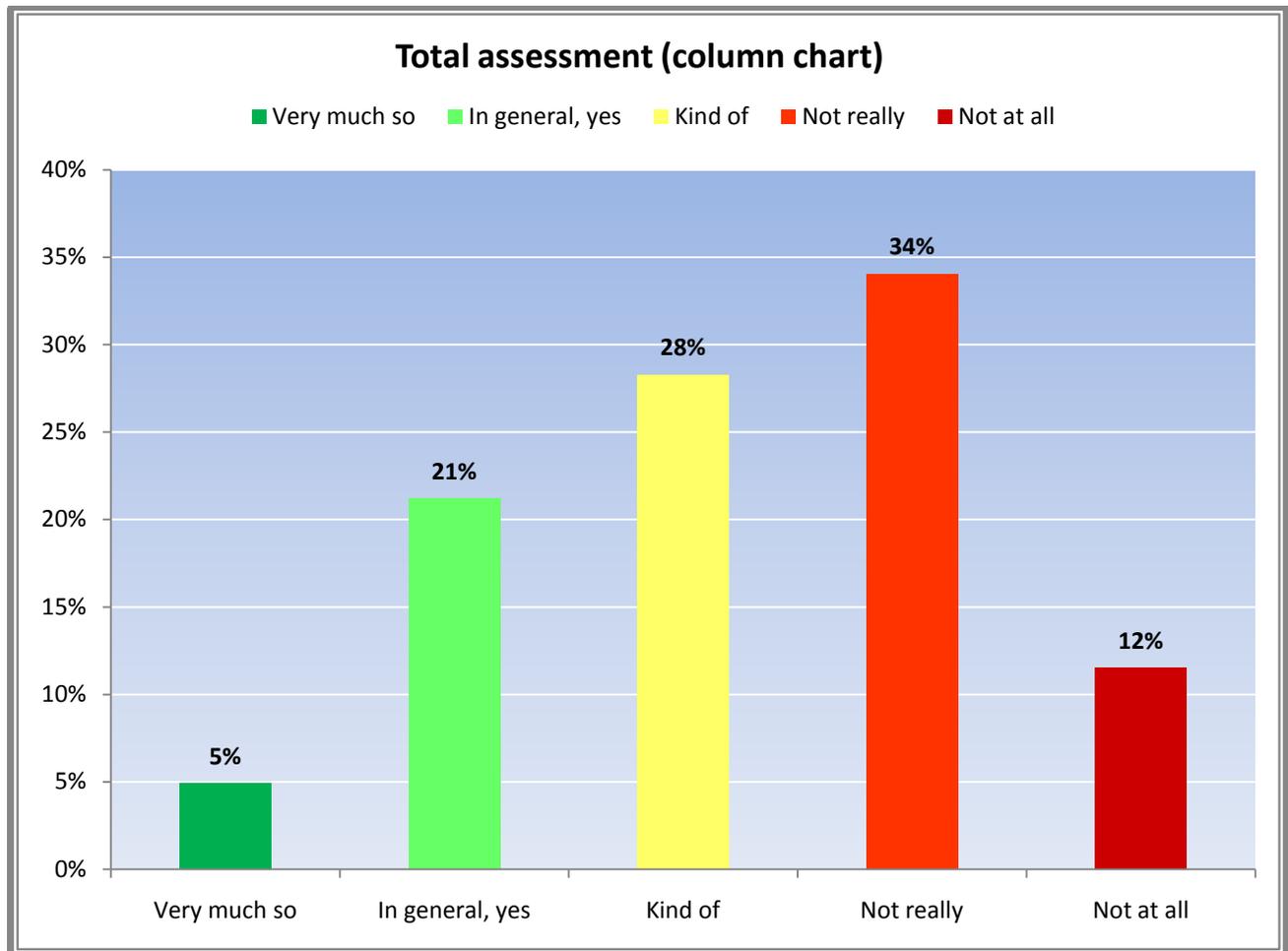


Fig. 1: Total assessment (column chart)

The chart shows clearly that with 34%, the category “Not really” outweighs the other categories by far, and taken together with “Not at all” represents 46% or nearly half of all respondents.

The pie chart below depicts the results in another fashion and clearly illustrates, that the positive side (displayed in shades of green totaling 26%) is much smaller than the combined orange and red ratios depicting a negative impression (46%). The remaining 28% of participants responding "Kind of," show some level of ambivalence although not completely negative or positive.

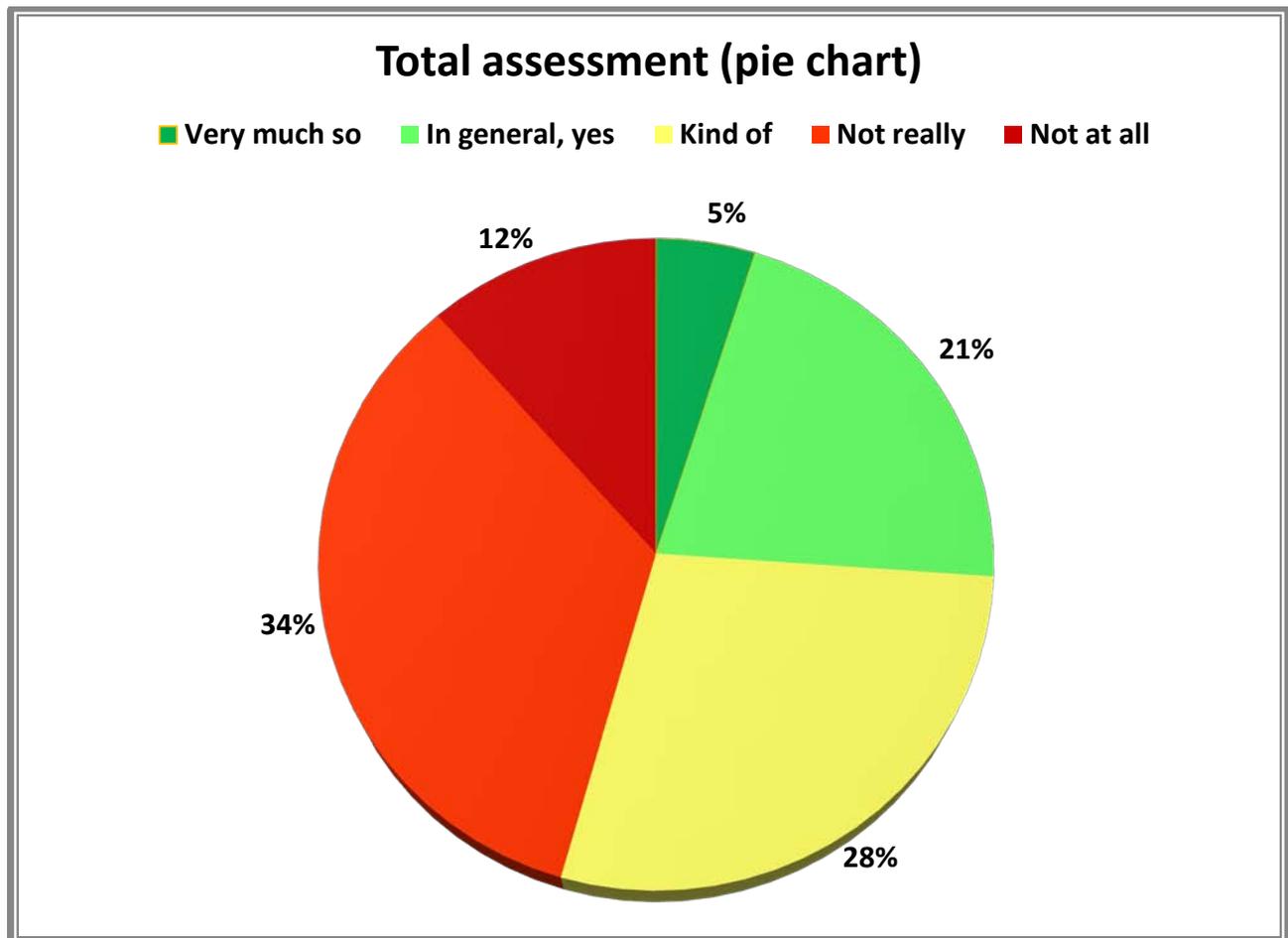


Fig. 2: Total assessment (pie chart)

## Assessment by various circumstances

Based on the answers to questions 3-6, we will look from various angles on the answers to the main question of the survey, whether or not “Danes are perceived as being open to foreigners”.

### By length of stay in Denmark

In the survey, participants could select answers from the categories 0-1 year / 1-3 years / 3-5 years / 5-10 years / over 10 years.

The pie chart below shows that 76% of the participants have lived in Denmark for less than five years. This is the category the government is strongly focusing its efforts on for retaining foreign talent (fastholdelses) since the majority of people coming to work in Denmark leave during this time period. Therefore this is an interesting angle to look at in regards to how open Danes are perceived.

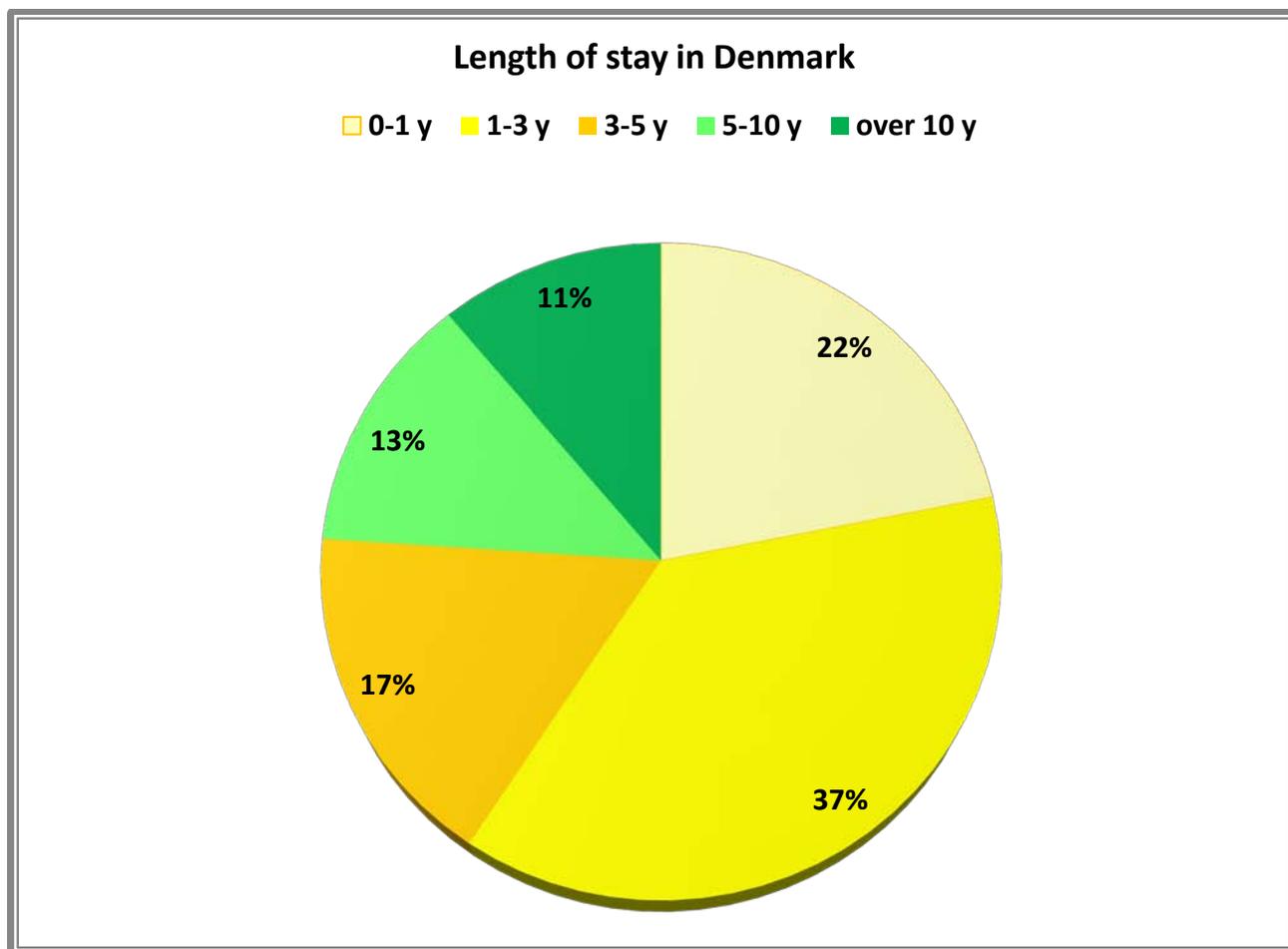


Fig. 3: Length of stay in Denmark



The column chart below compares the respondent’s assessments based on how long people have lived in Denmark. You can see that in the first year, people have a much more positive perception than later, which can be due to the “honeymoon phase” in the cultural adjustment cycle.

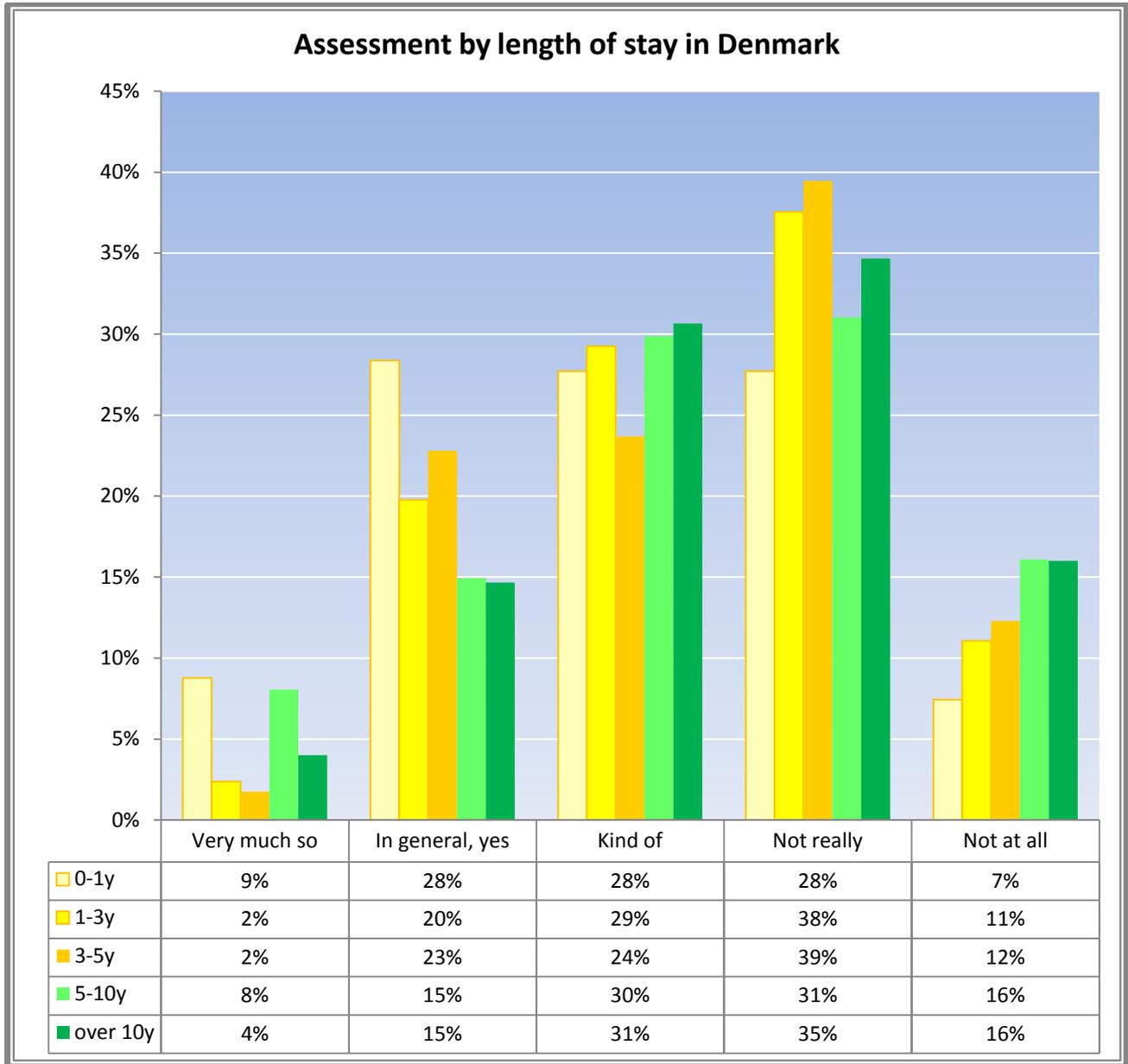


Fig. 4: Assessment by length of stay in Denmark



## By place of residence in Denmark

The chart below shows that by far most survey participants live in the Copenhagen area. We are however very pleased that the survey reached many from the other regions in Denmark as well.

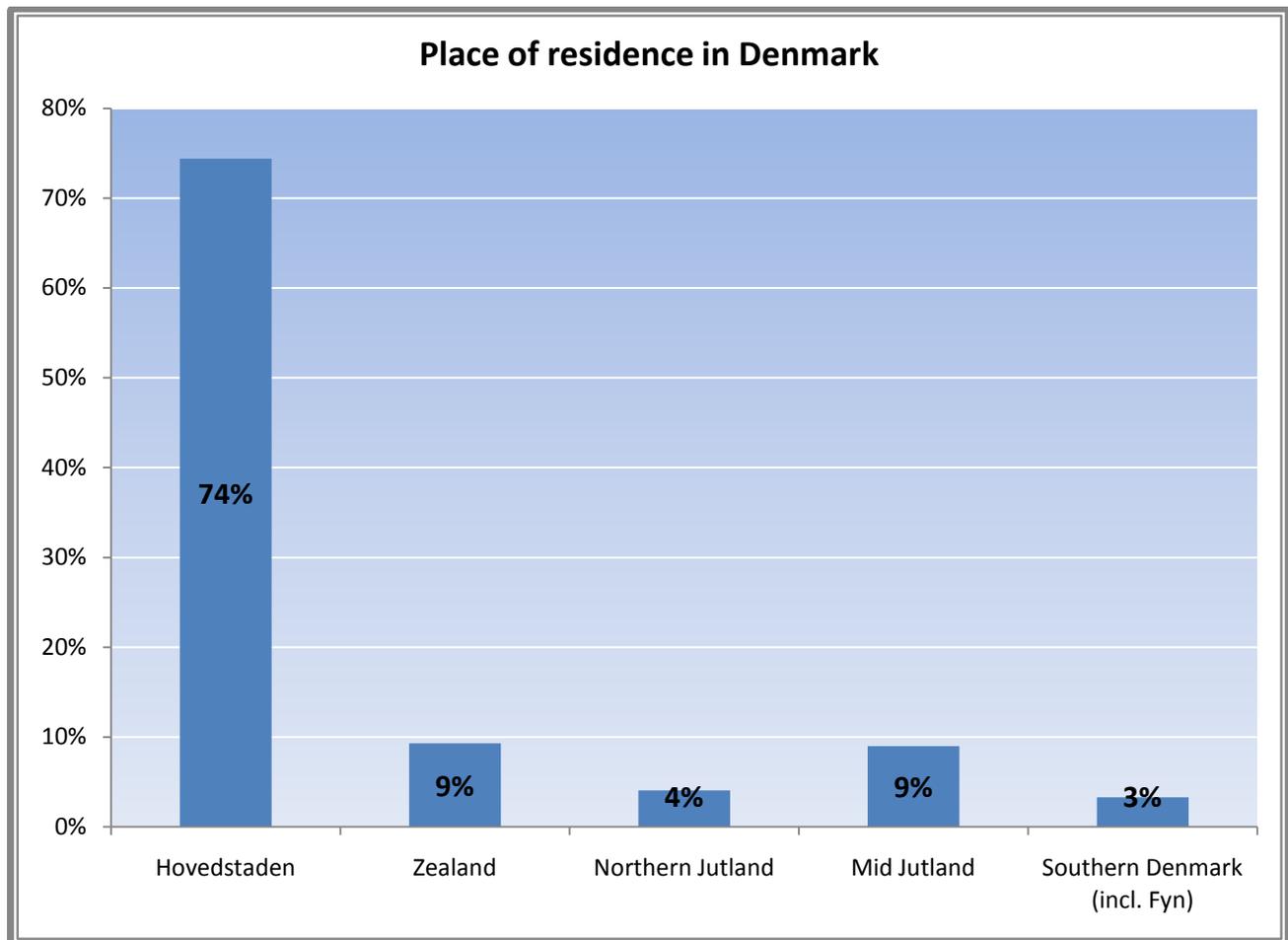


Fig. 5: Place of residence in Denmark

The chart below shows the assessment by region. Hovedstaden, Zealand and Mid Jutland show a rather similar picture. The figures for Northern Jutland and Southern Denmark are painted in lighter colors as the number of participants might not be high enough for the assessment to be considered representative.

Some participants commented that Danes in Copenhagen are perceived as being more open whereas others mentioned that those in Jutland are friendlier in general and also towards foreigners, which shows that there is no clear picture in this regard.

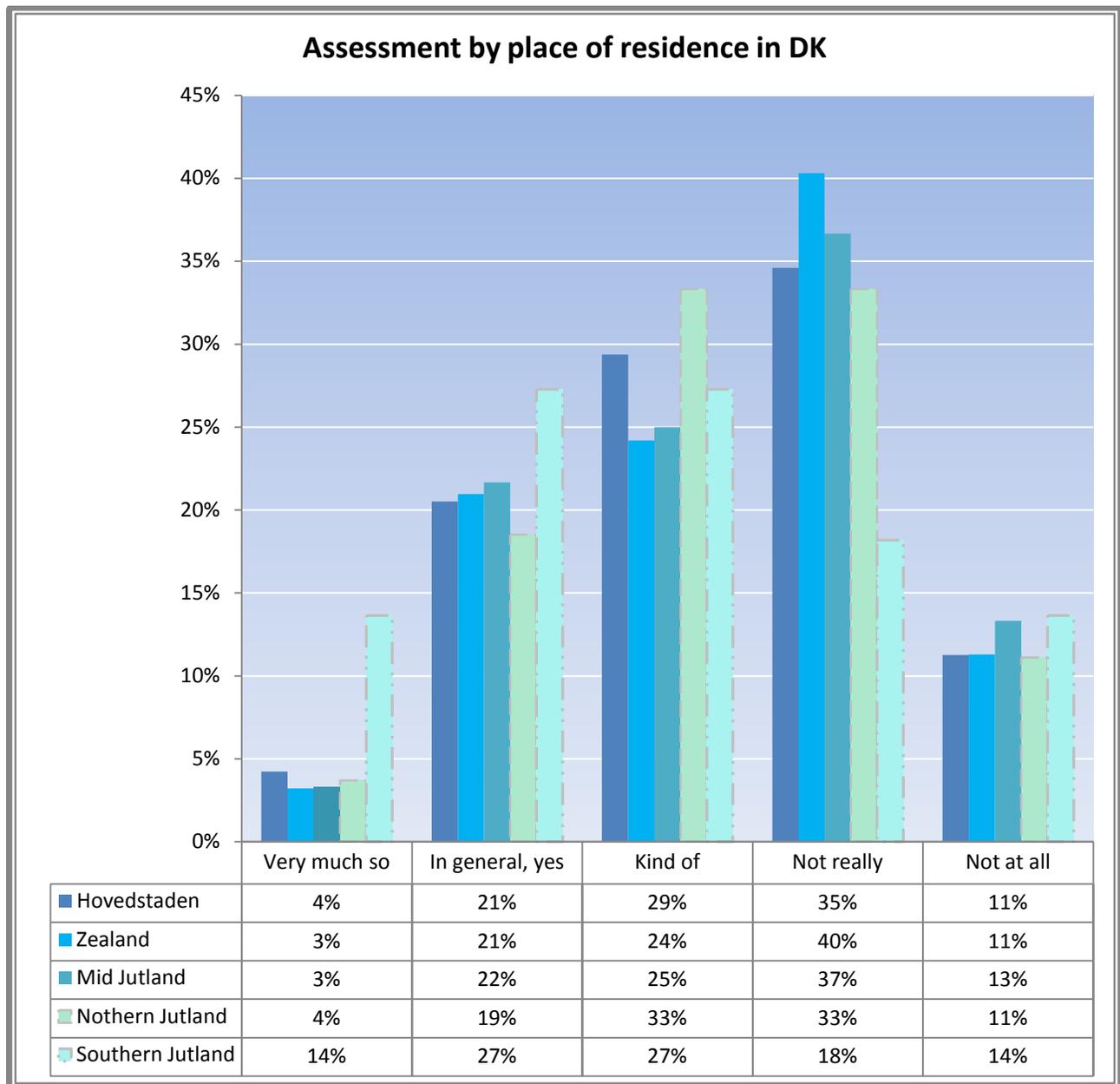


Fig. 6: Assessment by place of residence in Denmark

## By education level

In public and political discussions it is often mentioned, that Danes are open to foreigners, just not to those that don't want to integrate and who are a burden to the welfare system. It is also often mentioned that well-educated foreigners are wanted in Denmark as their skills are needed in order to help the country stay competitive on a global level and thus ensure the welfare system. Does this reflect the foreigners' experience? Therefore it was important to assess the answers to the question "Do you perceive Danes open to foreigners living in Denmark" from this angle as well.

The chart below shows that 76% of the survey participants have a longer education, 21% an education of medium length and 2% a shorter education. The high number of well-educated survey participants may be due to the fact that the information about the survey was distributed online only. Follow-up surveys may use additional media to reach a wider range of people with a more varied educational background.

Based on the comments submitted it could be interpreted that many of the respondents choosing the category "medium-length education" were either students or had a bachelor's degree and thus can also be considered well-educated.

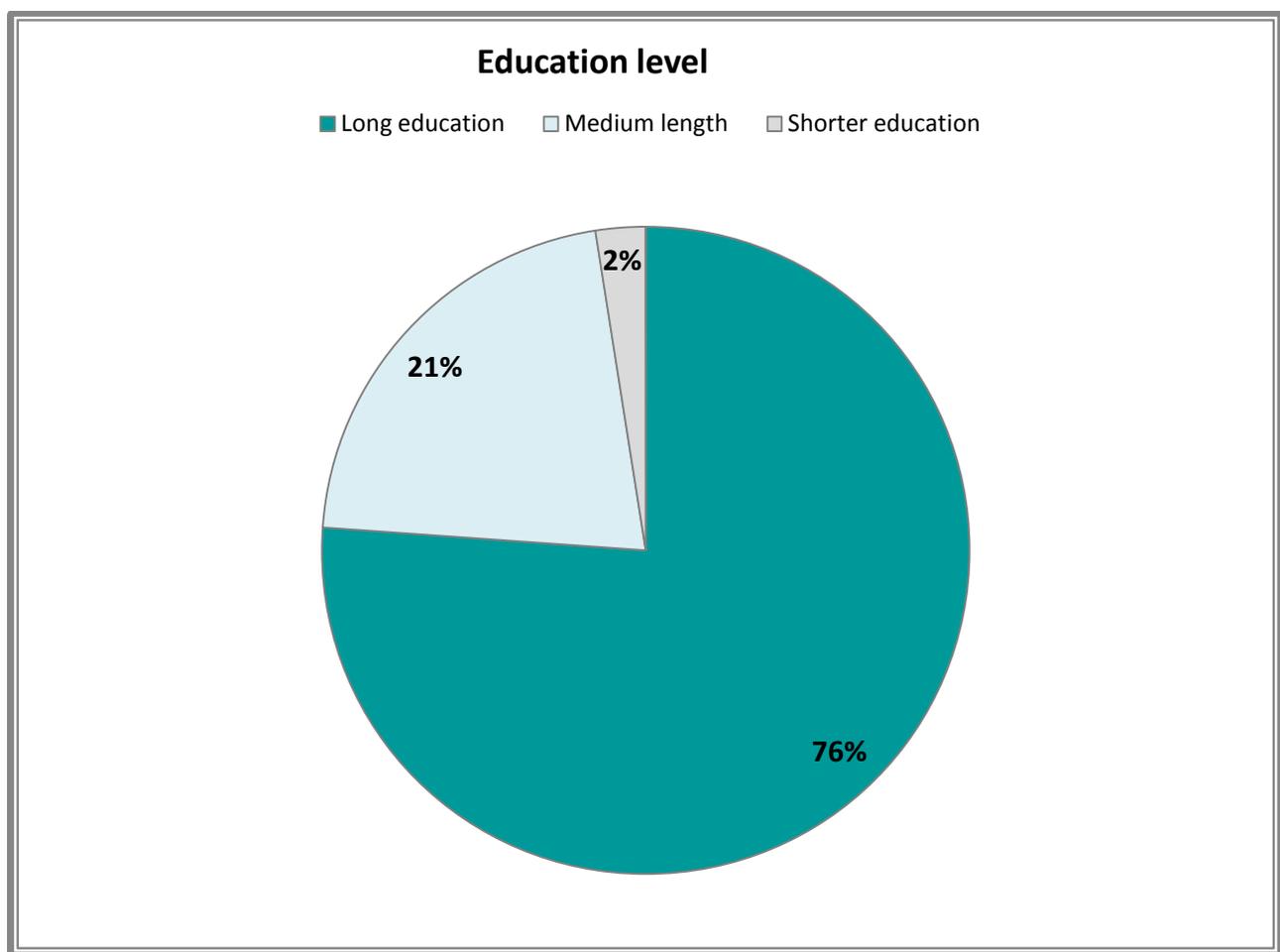


Fig. 7: Education level

The chart below illustrates the respondent’s assessment compared to varying education levels. It is surprising to see that participants with higher education show a less positive assessment than the other groups – a discrepancy between what is claimed (well-educated foreigners being welcome) and what is perceived.

The assessment from respondents with a shorter education may not be representative due to there being a low number of participants.

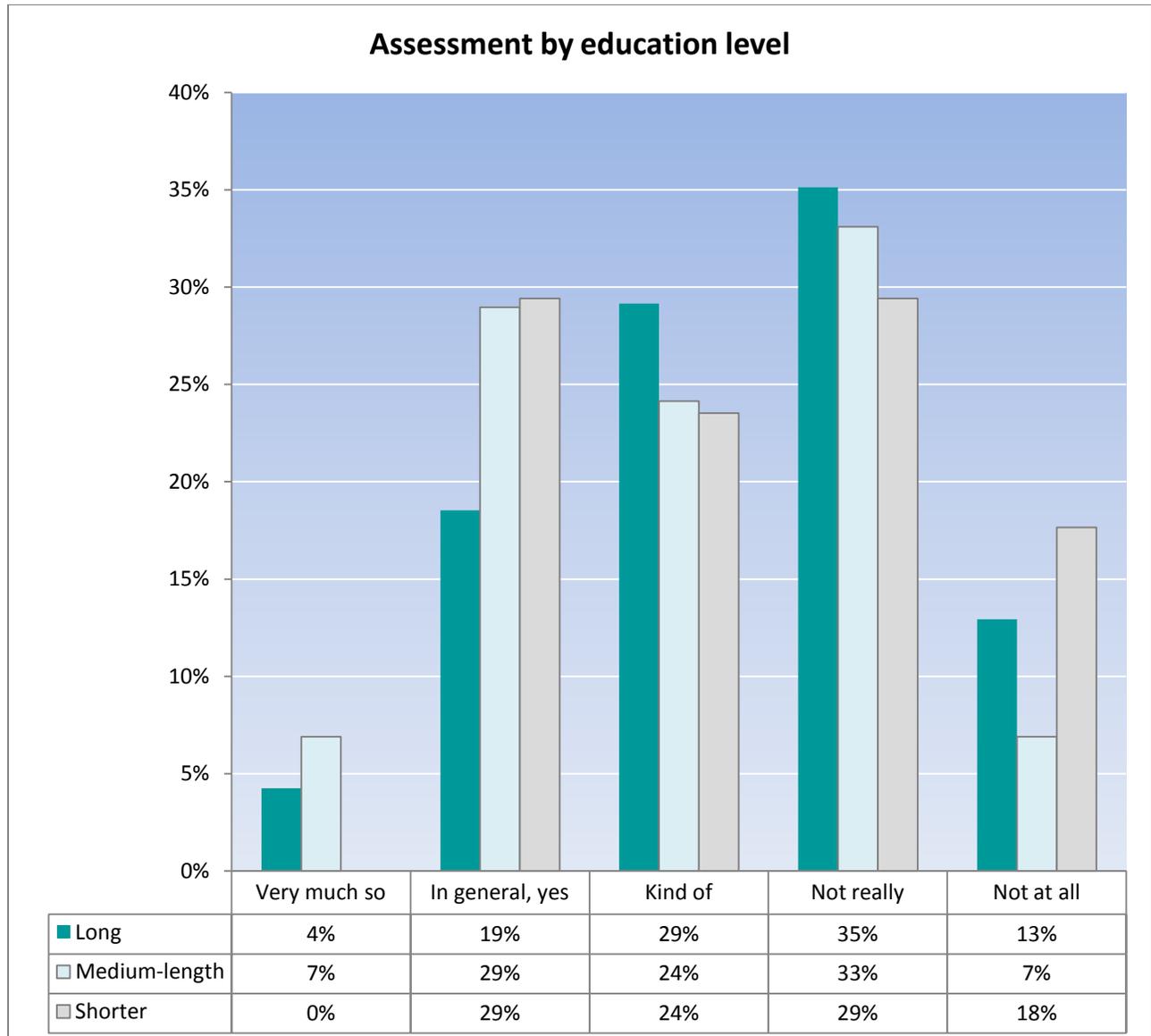


Fig. 8: Assessment by education level

## By country of origin

The public and political discussions around foreigners are often concerning their country of origin. It is frequently stated not only in political and public discussions but also by individuals, that Danes are open to people coming from Western countries, and to others that have similar values to Denmark. Thus, we wanted to look at the answers from this angle as well.

The chart below reflects which three countries had the highest numbers of participants: U.S.A, followed by the UK and India. Two of these countries are Western ( U.S.A, UK) whereas India is considered non-Western.

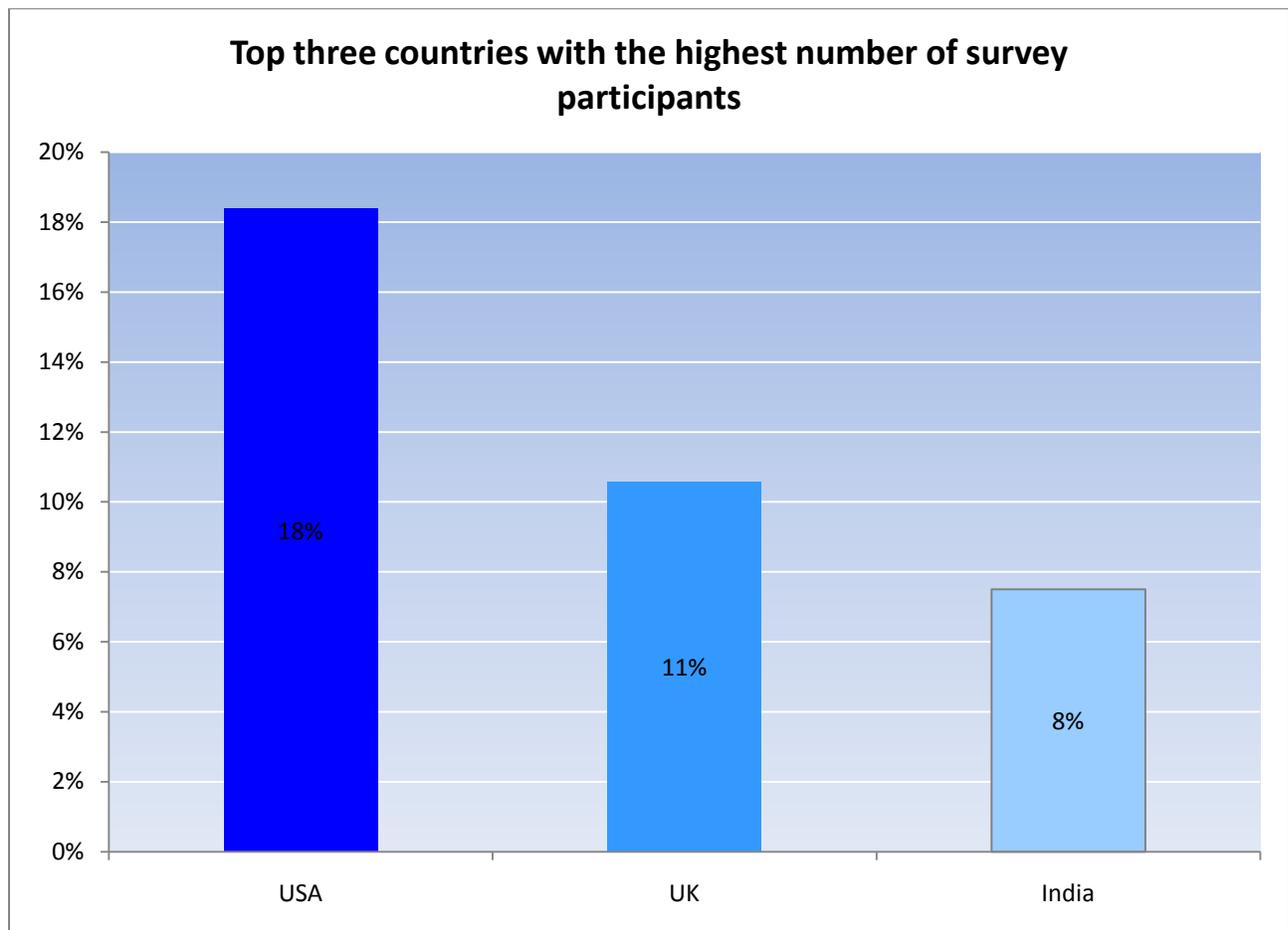


Fig. 9: Respondents from the U.S.A, UK and India made up 37% of the total respondents, making them the most represented countries in the survey.

The chart below shows the assessment of participants by their country of origin. Comparing the three countries, it is somewhat interesting to note that participants from the U.S.A and UK show a less positive assessment to the question “Do you perceive Danes open to foreigners living in Denmark” than participants from India. This shows a discrepancy between what is often claimed by Danes (that they are open to foreigners from Western countries) and what is actually perceived by foreigners.

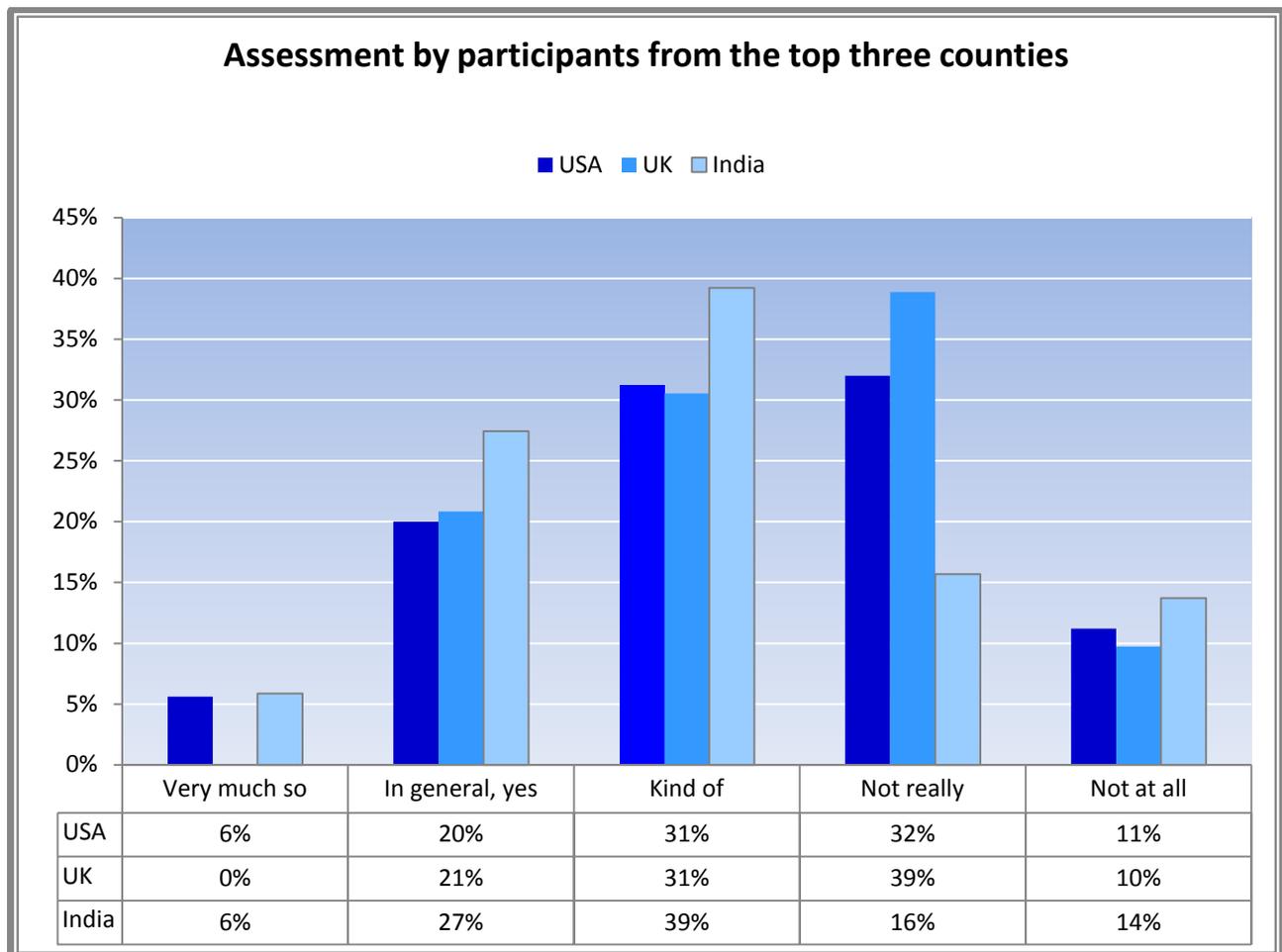


Fig. 10: Foreigners from the U.S.A and UK, both Western countries, show a similar opinion with responding nearly the same in categories, “Kind of,” “Not really,” or “Not at all,” while India indicates a general higher satisfaction.

This discrepancy between the claimed and perceived openness towards foreigners shows a gap that required a closer look at how other countries with a similar background than Denmark perceive Danes' attitude towards foreigners in Denmark.

We had 35 participants from Scandinavia in the survey and their perception offered interesting insights as well. Some of them were Danes, of which some have lived abroad and saw Denmark in a new light when returning home, some of them mentioned having a foreign partner and indicated they were aware of the experiences a foreigner has in Denmark. Even if the number of participants from Scandinavian countries is perhaps not representative, the chart below shows a very similar assessment compared to the overall result of the survey.

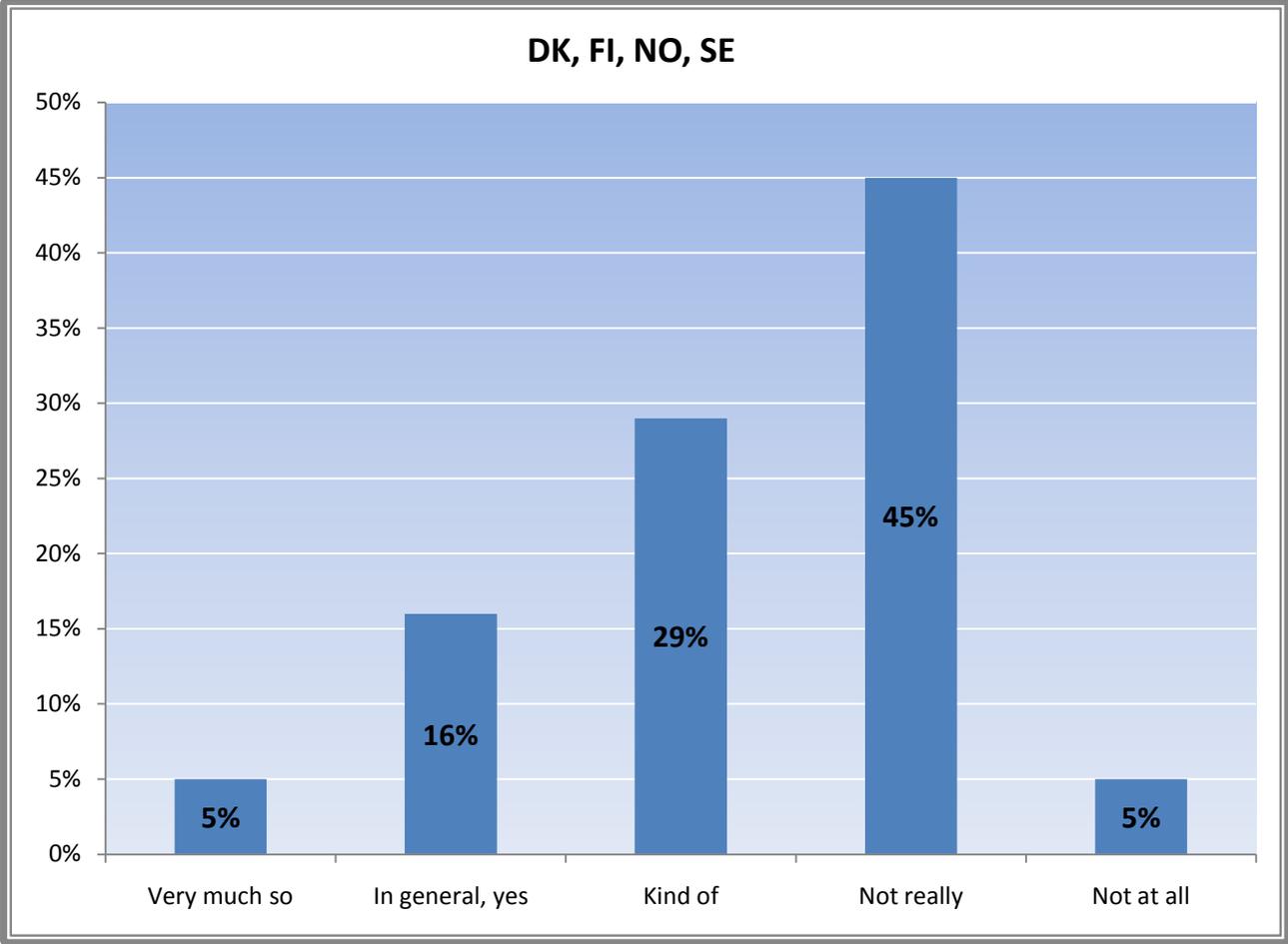


Fig. 11: Assessment from participants from Scandinavia

In order to analyze the gap between claimed and perceived openness it was important to assess the responses of participants from the old EU/EFTA countries as well. These countries' political systems and values are similar to Denmark, and when you take into consideration the claim that Denmark and the Danes are open to foreigners from Western countries, it would naturally be expected that participants from the EU experience a higher level of openness to them. However this doesn't seem to be the case. Even if the EU/EFTA country responses are slightly more positive than the overall assessment of all participants, the distribution of the varying levels of opinion is also very similar.

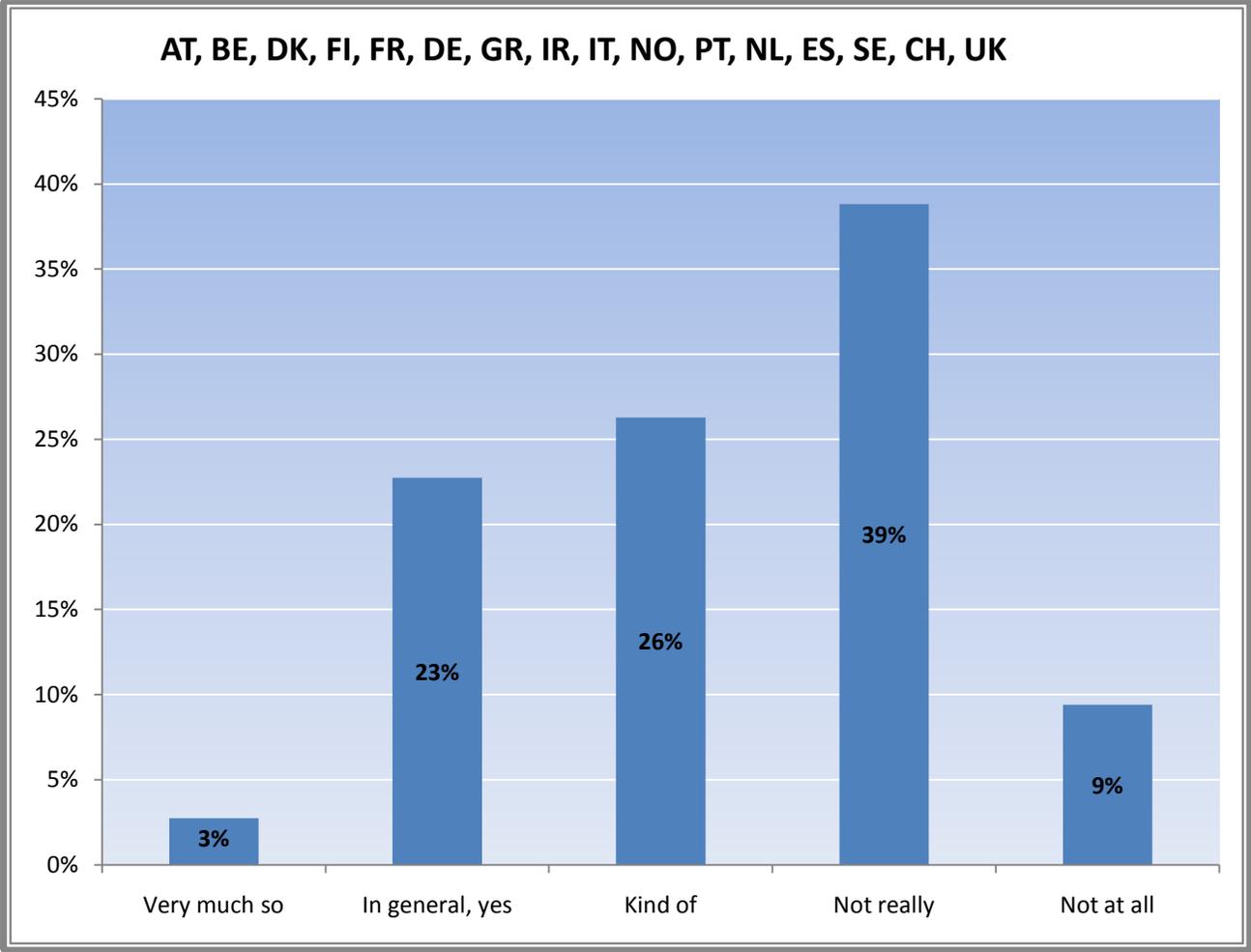


Fig. 11: Assessment of participants from old EU/EFTA



The last three charts are very intriguing as they show a strong discrepancy between the Danish view of their own openness towards foreigners and the foreigner's actual experience. The general belief of Danes in public, political and private discussions is that they are open to foreigners, particularly to those coming from Western countries or from countries with a similar background than Denmark. What's striking is that the survey revealed that foreigners do not perceive this to be the case. In order to uncover the real reasons for this, a more detailed investigation is required. However, three potential explanations could be considered when evaluating the following questions:

How open do foreigners expect Danes to be?

Maybe the expectation of foreigners is set too high due to how Denmark is marketed abroad. One of the main points in such marketing information is about how open Danes are. But open to what, and to what degree? The responses gained from the survey participants show that many foreigners don't experience the openness often cited and described as such.

Are Danes in general really as open towards foreigners as they think they are?

As mentioned earlier, in many public, political and private discussions Danes are referred to as being open to foreigners from the Western world especially from countries with similar values as Denmark. However, the discussions generalize and focus mainly on foreigners without education, being unemployed, misusing benefits, and are hence a burden to the Danish welfare system and society. This probably influences the general attitude of Danes towards foreigners. What is not often mentioned are all the foreigners that are working, paying their taxes, contributing to the welfare system, and speaking Danish and are well-integrated in the Danish society. Where are they in this discussion? Why are they ignored?

How much is the perception of not feeling wanted in the country connected to the negative tone and generalization about foreigners in the public and political discussion?

Considering how much weight the negative aspects have in the integration discussions, the reality is misrepresented. It is important to realize that public opinion is however shaped based on this misrepresentation.



## The 5 Main Challenges

The comments given as a response to Question 2, “What situations and experiences do you base your assessment on?” with regards to the respondents perception of how open Danes are towards foreigners living in Denmark, can be put into five main categories:

- Social interaction
- Government and authorities
- Media
- Language
- Being treated as equal

These aspects will be looked at in detail in this chapter.

### Social interaction

This category was most represented in participant’s comments.

Many of those that answered “Very much so” and “In general, yes” to the main question of the survey “Do you perceive Danes open towards foreigners living in Denmark”, refer to having found Danish friends. The lower the assessment the more people mention that they hadn’t. Many have lived in Denmark for several years, without getting to know any Danes very well.

Several mention that without having Danish connections building social ties with Danes is stated as being difficult. It is often cited that many experience that Danes have their own circle of friends and because of this it is not easy to be included. This however is recognized as a challenge for Danes as well, when they relocate within Denmark or return to Denmark after living abroad. Many of those that have made friends with Danes mention a good level of interaction with their neighbors.

Danes acting friendly and helpful is mentioned more often by the participants who chose the answers “Very much so” and “In general, yes” to the question “Do you perceive Danes open towards foreigners living in Denmark?”. The comments refer to experiences in public places such as shops, public transportation and hospitals, however it seems that foreigners have a more positive interaction with Danes at work than outside.

#### Quotes:

- *“I have made many really good Danish friends.”*
- *“We have very friendly neighbors. They help us a lot with our house and invite us for parties.”*
- *“My neighbors welcomed me to the neighborhood. They are interested in my background but also want to help me become acquainted with local culture/traditions.”*
- *“We love it here because we are lucky to have really good Danish friends. But some of our expat friends unfortunately don't share the same good experiences as we have.”*
- *“Came for a year – still here, so I like it a lot but I know others have different stories.”*
- *“Most Danes are still reasonably open, but have become less and less so over the past 10 years.”*
- *“As a person of color who has lived in DK for over 45 years I have experienced the change in the average Dane's attitude toward foreigners.”*
- *“I experience Danes open at the office and outside work. It's just making social contact that proves to be difficult.”*
- *“They are nice once you meet them and talk to them, but they don't want to integrate. My friends are only other foreigners living in Denmark.”*



- *"They are open to a certain point but it is generally difficult to make friends with them"*
- *"Danes are reserved people, even among themselves"*
- *"They have their own circles where it is not easy to get into."*
- *"Meeting & engaging Danes 'without connection' can be very hard."*
- *"You have to be the one who makes that 'extra effort'"*
- *"Danes prove to be open only when the first step is done by you, they don't take initiative."*
- *"If you do not speak Danish well enough to participate in specific clubs, adult education courses or social courses, one just can't become friends with them."*
- *"A general feeling of being closed out of society until you can speak more of the language"*
- *"Danes are usually open if you can provide value for society with your profession and if you speak their language."*

Some participants state having met Danes that are interested in foreign cultures, and wish to practice speaking foreign languages (English, Spanish, French, etc.), however those that gave lower assessments indicate that they have experienced less of that. Those that have little interaction with Danes perceive the missing contact as a sign of less openness to other cultures. A certain curiosity about foreigners is experienced but at the same time there seems to be a tendency of Danes making generalizing negative comments about foreigners.

**Quotes:**

- *"Although many Danes seem to have little or no contact to foreigners, they seem to have 'vivid' opinions about how foreigners 'drain state budget', are involved in illegal activities and are generally 'annoying.'"*
- *"It seems that the only income Danes can envision for foreigners is welfare."*
- *"If you don't work, you take Dane's benefits. If you work, you take their jobs."*
- *"In many situations they talk negatively about 'those immigrants' and 'those Polish workers'. However they wouldn't see this attitude as being against foreigners coming to Denmark."*
- *"Most Danes think that expats don't pay any tax but still benefit from their system."*

It is often mentioned that interacting in English with Danes is rather easy, however those that have given a lower assessment mention often that Danes switch to Danish during social occasions, even with people around them that don't speak the language. This seems to happen often also at parties and other social occasions where the foreigners have been specifically invited to, and it seems to happen also in companies where English is the official language.

**Quotes:**

- *"For instance in social gatherings they primarily speak in Danish and subtly imply you learn it too."*
- *"Even when in a group there are some speaking only English, given the opportunity they all quickly and collectively switch back to Danish."*
- *"In groups they would speak English as long as I was speaking. But as soon as I stopped they would all go back to speaking Danish."*



The question regarding “for how long one is in Denmark,” raises mixed feelings. By some it is seen as a sign of interest, others however hear it as a concern.

#### **Quotes:**

- *“Even if you speak fluent Danish and they catch the accent, Danes switch immediately to English or start asking you 1,000 questions (proof of serious concerns)”*
- *“They ask about why you are here and for how long you stay. If you are on holiday or under a predetermined contract it's o.k., if you are here to stay you can sometimes see their face change.”*

#### **Thoughts:**

The more social interaction the participants had with Danes, the more they perceived Danes as being open to foreigners living in Denmark. If foreigners were seen as being more as an asset, Danes could actually benefit more from them, also in their private life. Foreigners speak languages fluently, which Danes might want to learn. Danes might want to travel to a foreign country on vacation. “Insider” knowledge from people coming from those countries can help them to get much more out of their vacation.

Being invited to Danish social occasions is seen as a sign of openness towards foreigners. We know that in general Danish hosts spend a lot of effort to pair foreigners up with people that speak English. However conversation quickly switches to Danish which results in the foreign guests not having a chance to follow. It can be very uncomfortable and lonesome if a whole evening is spent in such an atmosphere.

Also in other countries foreigners can feel left out of the conversation in the company of locals when discussions naturally switch to the local language. However for Denmark, the expectation of foreigners may be set too high due to how the country is marketed abroad. One of the main points in such marketing information is about how well Danes speak English and how easily one can live in Denmark without speaking Danish. There seems to be a gap here again concerning how Denmark is represented, what Danes believe and the reality of what foreigners experience.

When talking about the first social contacts made, neighbors were mentioned by the survey participants. Considering how strong the scout movement (spejder) is in Denmark, maybe some community activities could be set up. It doesn't even have to be “one good deed a day,” it could just be an informal get together to help foreigners to get to know and enjoy Denmark from the start. Although associations (foreninger) and evening schools are *the* place to meet Danes, newcomers often cannot use this option due to lack of (enough) Danish skills in at least the first two years. Other avenues have to be taken until then to get to know Danes.

### **Government and authorities**

Those participants that assessed the Danish openness towards foreigners higher, mention that they have received good service by Danish authorities (also in English). But those with a lower assessment cited aspects around government and authorities in a less positive light more often.

Authorities, Udlændingetjeneste service and Dansk Folkeparti are mentioned in various contexts as not being open towards foreigners. It is seen as a lack of openness that the government is trying to make it more and more difficult for foreigners to stay permanently in Denmark, and is also seen by the fact that the immigration law is changed frequently.

Tough rules, e.g. regarding changing driving licenses, are also seen as a sign of lack of openness.



People seem to have experienced various issues in regards to immigration, stay and work permits and CPR numbers (interestingly this was also mentioned by several EU citizens). In many cases, the process had taken a long time and people did not get information about the status of their application even when asking for it.

**Quotes:**

- *"The Danes are welcoming but the Danish government is not."*
- *"The government is trying to make it more difficult for foreigners to stay in Denmark permanently."*
- *"The fact that the Udlændingelov is constantly being changed (on average every eighth month) means that the goal for those of us who wish to attain permanent residency keeps shifting and we have little or no hope of achieving it."*
- *"There have been changes to foreigner laws three years in a row."*
- *"The Government administration is hard to follow and does not allow for easy integration."*
- *"The government doesn't seem very foreigner-friendly, even though they say they want to attract more foreigners."*
- *"Just look at the difficulty of getting a work permit/visa from Udlændingservice."*
- *"Immigration is not putting enough resources into the very thing they supposedly need...foreign workers."*
- *"The government is changing requirements on gaining citizenship including language skills and making it retroactive so that people who have already passed have to do it again and then making those tests harder than they were before."*
- *"Institutional Denmark is not open. For example, why does someone with 28 years of a good driving record in the U.S. have to go through the challenging Danish drivers theory test?"*
- *"DF is certainly not open to foreigners and they must have a strong backing to be in power."*
- *"News featuring DanskFolkeparti are rather disturbing"*
- *"It is getting more and more uncomfortable being a foreigner in Denmark, due to the political orientation in the country."*
- *"The negative effect of 'politics of fear' has had a very negative impact on the populace. People are being molded by some cynical politicians to believe that everything bad is linked with foreigners."*
- *"Foreigners are seen more as a problem, than an asset or a resource."*

Interacting in English with authorities seems not to be a problem for some and a challenge for others. It was mentioned specifically though by many that people have experienced less friendly and less supportive interaction with authorities.

Acceptance of their foreign education and qualifications seems to be a challenge. The lengthy and tedious assessment process of foreign educations at CIRIUS also gives a perception of less openness. Many people are surprised that forms and documents for newcomers are in Danish, like forms for permits, at SKAT, starting a business, or language schools.

**Quotes:**

- *"On the one hand, professionals from other countries are encouraged to live and work in Denmark, but the public services are not friendly to non-Danes (i.e., when you call the police and all the voicemail prompts are in Danish...even 112; Hospital, Immigration, Driving Tests -- no English available)."*
- *"Internet websites, information is often not in English."*
- *"Customer service on the telephone is not very good or downright rude when you speak Danish with an accent"*
- *"Governmental institutions like "folkeregisteret" where they can't speak English does not show me an open-minded Denmark."*



## Thoughts

We understand the need for rules in immigration and residency policy. Such rules exist in any other country. It would, however, make a huge difference if these rules were more transparent, more stable and more reliable in the longer term. It would also help if the retention (fastholdelses) efforts would go hand in hand with the laws. Retention efforts being increased but the immigration laws being tightened is counterproductive and bound to lead to frustration and disappointment.

A positive, welcoming attitude by authorities and organizations that deal with foreigners would be a first step and make a huge difference in Denmark. Even if the rules are tight, a positive, welcoming attitude would not hinder authority staff in ensuring that the rules are obeyed. It is also worth considering that for many foreigners, authority staff is often the first Danes they meet. Their attitude has a strong influence on how open Denmark is perceived towards foreigners.

It is important to differentiate foreigners more in the public and political discussions. Not all foreigners are a problem and a burden to the welfare system and opposed to integrate. On the contrary, many are strong contributors and interested in becoming part of the society. Recognizing them for being the assets and the resource they truly are, will have a huge influence.

Currently discussions around foreigners are similar to those of the school system in former times. Chiding, scolding and punishing were seen as good ways to bring and keep people on the right track. Later on it was discovered that motivation and a positive approach produce better results. Why not use these tools in integration as well? This can help in integration and acceptance of foreigners. Many foreigners do great things for Denmark, and valuing them could support the integration of others.

It would be helpful to involve more foreigners in the public and political discussions *about* them and in the integration projects *for* them. Having mainly Danes talking about foreigners and running projects for them cannot give optimal results. Just imagine projects for women run only by men, or projects for youth run without their involvement. The involved foreigners will feel valued and they can be role model for others. They also know the challenges and potential solutions much better than any Dane can imagine, like how one can meet Danes without knowing Danish. How would a Dane know the answer?

## Media

The media often came up as a factor for Danes being perceived as less open. There were many comments going in the same direction and refer to negative stories around foreigners and immigrants being at the top of the news and foreigners usually being presented as a problem and not as an asset.

### Quotes:

- *"You also see ethnic looking people in the Danish media, and not always in stories about the problems of integrating foreign immigrants."*
- *"The media are full of negative stories. I do believe, however, that they are sometimes biased. With the media discriminating immigrants, and keeping it at the top of a news story... every day...it sends out negative information into the Danish society, and many Danish people don't know the immigration laws. So discrimination towards immigrants will never stop as long as the media keeps this up."*
- *"Many Danes have negative views about non Western immigrants, based on stories from Ekstra Bladet."*
- *"Every time you turn on the TV, you have the word "invandrer" (foreigner) being used as though it's the worst possible thing someone can be."*



- *"The media depictions of foreigners don't make a welcoming impression."*
- *"Media stories portraying 'others' as threatening."*
- *"Racist comments are accepted in the media and in politics."*

## Thoughts

We are aware that negative stories sell better (not any different in many other countries). However, it is important to understand that the media also has a responsibility for the future of their country. A generalizing negative approach in talking about foreigners has consequences.

Media has a huge influence on shaping the public opinion, on how Danes perceive foreigners and how foreigners perceive Danes. Covering mainly negative stories and using a rough tone when relating about foreigners has a strong influence on the generalization and undifferentiated discussions and views about foreigners. Foreigners that don't know Danish well enough to understand them can sometimes consider themselves lucky.

Negative stories often generalize foreigners as being a problem, whereas good stories are about individuals. This approach results in an imbalance in perception. Considering that many Danes don't know any foreigners, the media heavily influences the view Danes have on foreigners and the public opinion in general. If foreigners are always presented as a problem, they will be perceived as a problem.

Similarly, the perception foreigners have about Danes is also influenced by what is presented in the media. If they hear many Danes talking negatively about foreigners, this will also influence how they see Danes in general.

It might help to involve foreigners more in programs around foreigners. It can be motivating to other foreigners and it can change the debate about foreigners and the generalizing picture about them. In addition it might help to change the attitude towards accented Danish as Danes will get more used to hearing it.

Offering English subtitles on the news programs can also be helpful. This will help newcomers not to be cut off from Danish news until they know Danish. By following the news, they will learn Danish easier and understand the country better.

## Language

Learning Danish is in general seen important for a successful integration by Danes as well as foreigners. However, language is somewhat perceived as a lose-lose situation.

The survey participants often mentioned that their efforts in speaking Danish don't seem to be valued. Few Danes seem to be willing to put up with a lower level of Danish and are not able to understand Danish spoken with a foreign accent. Some people have experienced that Danes don't speak English to them, but they would also not speak Danish slower.

Some people have also experienced that if they speak English, they are ignored.

Finding work without speaking (good) Danish often seems to be a challenge.

An interesting comment was that people felt closed out of society until they can speak Danish.

Many have mentioned that speaking Danish with an accent resulted in being treated worse than speaking English. When speaking Danish some experienced that they were not taken as serious as when speaking English.



### Quotes:

- *"Man taler aldrig godt nok dansk." (one never speaks Danish well enough)*
- *"Danes seem to get annoyed when you don't speak perfect Danish."*
- *"Danes say we need to talk to people in order to learn the Danish language but, they don't really want to talk to us."*
- *"I have been discouraged by some Danes from trying to speak Danish, like 'no one wants to hear you crucifying our language.'"*
- *"Most Danes have no patience to understand what foreigners talk in Danish."*
- *"They always want one to speak perfect Danish otherwise they don't understand."*
- *"They won't speak English with me but yet won't speak slow Danish either."*
- *"Efforts of trying to speak Danish are not always appreciated and seen as a step towards the Danes and their culture."*
- *"Some Danes don't take foreigners seriously when they want to learn the Danish language."*
- *"Some Danes don't want to bother to speak English. Some won't help you with learning Danish - just switch to English."*
- *"When Danes hear me speak in English they might turn away and go."*
- *"Some Danes refused to speak English to me since we are supposed to learn Danish anyway."*
- *"Most Danes I've encountered show disdain for English speaking visitors or expats."*
- *"Getting service/help with tax, troubles with housing, electricity, etc. is difficult if you don't speak Danish."*
- *"Getting a job without excellent Danish skills is extremely difficult although many companies claim to be international and embrace diversity."*

### Thoughts

Most Danes expect foreigners to learn the language, if they want to stay in the country longer. This is totally fair. And most foreigners want to learn it. However, learning Danish takes time, usually two years or longer. In the meantime people will not speak correct Danish. They can learn proper Danish *only* by speaking to Danes and it takes a lot of practice.

It might be tiring for Danes to listen to accented Danish, but foreigners make huge efforts to learn the language. It would be great if this effort was appreciated more and if foreigners would get the support of Danes for improving their language skills.

### Being treated as equal

Denmark is a very strong egalitarian society, something that is propagated heavily. By law this seems to be the case, however many participants in the survey have described that they perceive reality to be somewhat different. Discrimination has been mentioned by a number of participants.

Finding work seems to be a challenge and some have the feeling that foreigners don't have the same chances.

Several people mentioned problems with finding housing or that they felt that they are treated differently.

Several survey participants mentioned that they got the impression that Danes thought foreigners were over-paid, didn't pay taxes and as such received preferential treatment.



### Quotes:

- *"You will not get a response most of the time if you have a foreign name and if you are writing in English."*
- *"It is very difficult to find a flat to rent on the private market."*
- *"A high number of Danes attempt or do not give foreigners the same respect in terms of housing (i.e. proper rental contracts, treatment of them as a renter, overcharging as though all foreigners are rich)."*
- *"Colleagues seem to think that all expats are overpaid."*
- *"Some of our friends have been vocal about them actually paying for us since we only pay 25% tax".*
- *"Racist jokes at work are seen as normal (by just normal people). Racist terms used in politics are OK."*
- *"Exclusion and mobbing at the workplace"*
- *"There is an assumption that people with an accent are inferior."*
- *"Hundreds of interviews, well qualified for the work and a 101 reasons why I did not get the job."*
- *"Felt very often treated as a second rank person, no matter how many classes I took, how hard I was willing to work, or how well I spoke the language."*

### Thoughts:

It is surprising to see such comments in a country with such an egalitarian focus as Denmark. Situations as described above might be reality, they might just be perception or miscommunication and they might also be connected to staff not being service-minded. However, if the general experience would be that Danes were perceived more open towards foreigners living in Denmark, many of the misunderstanding might not happen at all.

It is important that Danes are aware that foreigners don't know the Danish culture well enough to understand subtleties. They might need more explanations to understand a situation properly. The Danish direct style of interaction can easily be perceived as unfriendly and patronizing. The usage of irony might also be something foreigners might not know from their culture. Thus in many situations foreigners don't have a chance to understand what is really meant. Jokes and laughs might be understood as being laughed *at* instead of it being just humor used to increase "hygge."

Considering that Denmark needs well-educated people to enter its workforce in the short, medium and long term it is important that the true potential of job candidates from abroad is recognized for its true value. Just because their education and expertise is different than a Danish one, doesn't mean that it doesn't have the same quality. It might be important to refine the methods and knowledge in order to be able to *recognize* the quality of the education and the experiences from abroad.

Involving non-Danish employees might first be seen as a challenge because various things might have to be adapted in a company, but it opens the door for being flexible which gives a huge competitive advantage in the longer term.



## Summary

Thank you for your interest in this survey. We hope you have found some interesting aspects and that the survey will trigger a thought process that will lead to positive change.

There are many good initiatives and programs to help foreigners integrate in Denmark, which shows that there is a lot of interest and support to help foreigners become part of the country. This survey shows however, that in spite of these efforts many foreigners don't feel welcome 46 percent versus 26 percent who do. There also seems to be a gap between how open Danes see themselves towards foreigners and the perception of the foreigners themselves.

Reducing generalizations and introducing a higher level of differentiation in the discussions about foreigners would serve to not only improve the perception of foreigners living in Denmark, but also aid contributors feel a greater sense of value.

As compared with work life, employees that feel valued by their employer will be more motivated, produce better results, motivate their colleagues and lead a more satisfied life. A similar result is bound to occur if the contributing foreigners feel more valued. Involving them in integration projects and in the public debate about foreigners could also have an influence on a better outcome and a better understanding. Identifying role models will be very helpful as well.

It is our hope that more Danes will support foreigners in their efforts to practice their Danish, which would result in them improving their language skills. By speaking the language better they will better integrate.

We can completely understand the wish of Denmark to remain a homogeneous society in order to keep things as they are and have been, because it has worked well. However, in order for Denmark to play a role on a global scale changes are required as is a different mindset towards foreigners. With a shortage of skills and workforce, foreign workers are needed. People coming from different cultures can influence Danish life, but this should not just be seen as a threat or a negative. It can also be seen as enriching the society as well.

The changes caused by industrialization in the past also raised fears in the communities and we can only be happy that those fears have not stopped progress. Similarly, globalization raises fears. However fear is not a good advisor for progress.

We are of the opinion that most foreigners want to give their best when moving to Denmark. Many of them have a good education and valuable experiences. Many are leaders and want to fulfill their career and personal potential. Denmark offers great opportunities in many areas, and foreigners can and want to contribute with their skills to support others, solve problems and produce new products and services. The potential is there. Let's make the most out of it.

Let us look at the challenges and create solutions *together* by cooperating and being open. We may be able to find solutions with a team effort making use of our differences for our mutual benefit and for the greater good of us all.

It will take tolerance, openness and a willingness to change – not only to change how we relate to each other but also how to communicate, cooperate and be in harmony with one another in this ever-changing global village where we all deserve to feel at home no matter where we are.