


Recruiting, receiving and retaining international employees

Thematic findings from interviews with employees at the Department of Public Health, SDU

Meeting with the Department's Task Force
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Maria Dockweiler, SDU' Gender Equality Team

Gender Equality Plans på SDU

- Som led i SDU's strategiske ligestillingsindsats vedtog direktionen i december 2019 at indføre GEPs (Gender Equality Plans) på SDU
- GEPs rammesætter ligestillingsindsatser på institutter, fakulteter og SDU som helhed
- SDU's GEP tager udgangspunkt i [EU's GEP-Framework](#), defineret af European Institute for Gender Equality, EIGE
- SDU's Gender Equality Team (GET) er koordinator for  SPEAR, et [H2020-projekt](#), der har til formål at implementere GEPs på europæiske forskningsinstitutioner, herunder SDU



European Institute
for Gender Equality

Hvorfor Gender Equality Plans (GEPs)?

For at

- Sikre gennemførelse, dokumentation og kvalitetssikring af SDU's ligestillingsindsats
- Strukturere og understøtte SDU's, fakulteters og institutters igangværende ligestillingsindsatser
- Perspektivere relevante og aktuelle problemstillinger på institutter ud fra ligestillingsopmærksomhed
- Tilbyde støtte til institutledere i arbejdet med ligestillingstemaer på institutterne

Og

- Lægge fundamentet for, at SDU opfylder kommende krav til støtte fra fx Horizon Europe, NORDFORSK etc.
- Leve op til EU's [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- Bidrage til, at SDU kan opfylde de tværgående kønsdimensioner af FN's verdensmål



GEPs på SDU:

ansvarlige aktører på tre organisatoriske niveauer



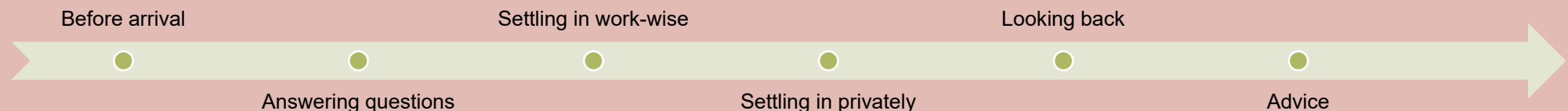
Set-up of the mini-project

- Findings are derived from 7 semi-structured interviews, completed November 2020 – January 2021
- Interviews took place online, on Zoom, and lasted 30-45 minutes

- Interviews were not recorded; extensive "live" notetaking and a summary after each interview informs the findings
- Informants' anonymity is secured through thematic findings, with no direct quotes or other personable references

- Interview informants were recruited by the Department, among academic and administrative staff. Informants:
 - have all been employed at the Department from less than 1 year to 5+ years
 - are predominantly from the EU, with a few from outside the EU
 - have almost all had prior experiences with living abroad, either in former employments or during studies

- Informants were asked to reflect on their experiences with arriving and settling into Denmark, with interviews following an almost chronologically framework illustrated below:



How or why did you end up at the department?

- Cold-called Department because of an interest in the research and academic profile of the department
- Was invited to join/apply through network contacts
- Saw an advertisement in a network email and realized SDU and the department had an interesting profile
- "Timing" of the academic career path made a change of scenery necessary – and Denmark and SDU seemed relevant and an "easy" move
- Family, friends or former colleagues pointing to SDU and/or Denmark as potential new destinations, either for work or for family life



Where did you get your questions answered before arriving at SDU?

- Google and the internet was helpful – although most pages had to be auto-translated to English
- Friends and family and private contacts in Denmark, especially reg. housing and practicalities
- The ISO website, especially regarding general information about housing and practicalities related to legal requirements, tax information etc.
- Asked the contact(s) at the Department, especially regarding housing

When you just got here: how did you settle in work-wise?

- There is a lot of academic freedom in Denmark. This was expected, but still positive to see that it's a reality
- With most job tasks: "freedom with responsibility" is practiced, no one is clocking or checking up on you
- There is a lot of work-related collaborations that ties the Department to other institutions outside of SDU and Denmark; this is appreciated by all internationals
- The environment at the Department is less harsh and competitive than what has been the experience abroad
- Time spent on or at work was an initial puzzle: Danes leave the office so, so early – but they then work so much in the evenings!

Settling in work-wise



When you just got here: how did you settle in socially and privately?

- Joining Facebook groups and other local networks of international expats to get acquainted with people
- Joining sports or other hobby clubs to grow network
- Practical stuff reg. visa, registration, tax and pension information felt overly complicated at times, especially in an otherwise very digitalized Denmark
- Information on rules and regulations were often given in very general terms, hard to find answers to concrete and case-specific questions
- Getting HOUSING sorted was crucial and complicated:
 - The housing help through the Department is highly praised by those using it – but not everyone knew about it
 - A recurring horror tale among all informants is that the housing market in Denmark is corrupt; this baffles them all
 - The consensus is that having a place to call home is critical to settling in, and this is not always smoothly achieved

Looking back, what has been imperative for your wellbeing here?

- Being patient with the system: Denmark is highly digitalized and hierarchically very flat, but it is not without its flaws
- Having kids here: they and the institutions have become a key to integrating and learning about the Danish culture
- Joining clubs/sports/networks and actively seeking out networks outside of work. It's more difficult than expected, to establish a social network
- Learning the language
- The Danes have excellent supermarkets 😊



If you were to give some advice to another new international employee?

- Go visit! Make sure you check the size of the city you'll end up in, the connection options with car or train etc.
- Do your homework regarding your social life: sports clubs, proximity to sea and cities, special food needs etc. Figure out what your dealbreakers are
- Do your homework regarding housing: What is your budget, where's your transport limit, who can you ask for help – especially before signing things?
- Danes take their paperwork seriously, so make sure you learn to master the skills needed to do that too
- Prioritize your language learning, and make a plan for how to make time for that when arriving
- Get an international buddy to help you settle in and answer all your silly questions

Main takeaways

- All informants had previous experience going abroad, calling that out as crucial
 - Are we also recruiting those without this experience? How to cater to them?
- Children/family contacts are key to cultural immersion
 - What about those arriving here without?
- The "red tape" issues regarding registration, visa, taxes and housing challenges surprised them all
 - Can we clarify things more here? Offer both generic and one-on-one q & a? Expand on information reg. the Danish health system?
- Sports are key to social life
 - Can we do more here, jointly with ISO? Do we keep lists and overviews of clubs, especially English-speaking?
- An international Buddy arrangement is greatly supported
 - Can this be rolled out in a more structured format than the informal ones the informants have had?
- Where are the Danish colleagues?
 - How may the lack of social interactions with colleagues (also international) translate to work-related interactions?