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PESTO & GRUYÈRE TWISTS



LAST WEEK IN
DENMARK



HOMES ROOTED IN SIMPLICITY



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JANUARY 2026 - WWW.THE-INTL.COM



DRAWING A MORE JOYFUL WORLD
AURÉLIA DURAND ON IDENTITY, MOVEMENT, AND MAKING SPACE.

EIGHT YEARS OF STORIES, COMMUNITY AND CARE

As The International marks eight years, we reflect on the role of storytelling in a complex world - and on the values that continue to guide our work.

DEAR READERS,

EIGHT YEARS AGO, The International Magazine began as a small but hopeful idea: to create a platform where internationals in Denmark - alongside Danes and readers around the world could find stories that reflect the complexity of living between cultures. Stories that inform, question, celebrate, and sometimes sit with the realities of modern life. Today, as we mark our eighth birthday, it feels both grounding and emotional to look back on what we've built together.

Since 2018, The International has grown into a space shaped by curiosity and care. We've published hundreds of articles spanning lifestyle, culture, opinion, real stories, sustainability, identity, and everyday life in Denmark and beyond. From guides that help newcomers navigate Danish society, to deeply personal reflections on language, loss, creativity, and change, our stories have always centred lived experience. Each article is a reminder that there is no single way to be international - and no single version of home.

What has always set The International apart is its people. Our contributors come from across the globe, bringing perspectives shaped by different languages, careers, traditions, and worldviews. Writers, editors, photographers, illustrators, and collaborators have given their time and insight to make this magazine what it is today. Together, they've created a publication that is thoughtful without being distant, honest without being heavy-handed, and welcoming without simplifying complexity.



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Over the years, our readership has grown steadily, reaching people well beyond Denmark's borders. Yet, despite that growth, we've remained committed to something smaller and more personal: building a sense of community through shared stories. We don't chase trends for the sake of relevance. Instead, we focus on relevance that lasts - stories that readers return to, share, and see themselves reflected in.

Celebrating eight years, however, feels different from celebrating past milestones. The state of the world weighs heavily on me personally at the moment. Ongoing conflicts, political uncertainty, and a general sense of instability make celebration feel complicated. It can feel uncomfortable to mark an anniversary when so much feels unresolved or uncertain.

And yet, it is precisely in moments like these that storytelling matters most.

SHAPING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A PUBLICATION

At The International, we've never believed that magazines exist only to distract or entertain. We believe they can hold space for reflection, dialogue, and understanding. When the world feels fractured, stories can still connect us - the way music does. They can remind us that care, nuance, and attention to one another are not luxuries, but necessities.

Being based in Denmark gives us a particular vantage point. Denmark is often seen as small, stable, and orderly, yet it is deeply connected to global movement, ideas, and histories. Many of us who live here come from elsewhere, carrying layered identities and perspectives shaped by migration, choice, circumstance, or chance. That in-between perspective - neither fully inside nor fully outside has shaped The International from day one.

Being international means looking outward without assuming authority. It means recognising that places and communities exist within broader historical, cultural, and social contexts that deserve attention and care. Over time, this awareness has become central to our editorial approach: listening closely, making room for voices to speak on their own terms.

A PLACE DEFINED BY CONNECTION

For many internationals living in Denmark, Greenland feels both present and distant - often spoken about, yet rarely understood in everyday conversation. What draws us is not political alignment or proximity, but people and place. Greenland's communities are shaped by a close relationship with nature, where land, sea, and climate are part of daily life. This relationship requires awareness, cooperation, and respect, influencing how people move through the world and care for one another.

Nature in Greenland is not ornamental or abstract. It is powerful, demanding, and central to life. Alongside this, the community plays a vital role. In towns and settlements separated by great distances, connection matters deeply. Knowledge is passed down through generations, culture is expressed through language, art, and storytelling, and there is pride in heritage and ways of life that continue despite change and outside attention.

As internationals - many of us guests in Denmark ourselves - we approach Greenland with humility. We recognise that history is complex and not always comfortable, and that Greenlandic voices must lead conversations about Greenland's present and future. Our role is not to speak on behalf of others, but to listen, to respect space, and to support when appropriate.

As The International moves forward, we do so with a clear value: that Greenland belongs to Greenlanders. We stand in support of their right to protect their land, preserve their culture, and shape their own future. In a world that often seeks to claim, simplify, or extract, our commitment is to care, respect, and solidarity - and to supporting Greenland remaining Greenland, for the people who call it home.

WHILE REFLECTION IS IMPORTANT, SO TOO IS CELEBRATION

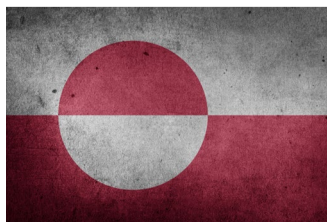
On January 22nd, we will be celebrating The International's 8th birthday with our community. This gathering is not about grand gestures, but about connection - bringing together readers, writers, contributors, collaborators, and friends who have helped shape us over the years. It's a chance to pause, share conversations, and acknowledge the collective effort behind what we've built.

If you haven't yet signed up, you are warmly invited to join us. Spaces are limited, and we're keeping the celebration intentionally intimate. You can find all the details and register here: <https://forms.gle/2pw65MrNeZnZTan68>

As we step into our ninth year, we do so with gratitude and intention. We remain committed to thoughtful storytelling, to amplifying lived experience, and to creating space for nuance in a world that often rushes past it. Thank you for reading, writing, sharing, and supporting The International over the past eight years. We look forward to what we will continue to build - together.

From my heart to yours,

Lyndsay Jensen
Editor-in-Chief & Founder



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The International

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CREATIVE AURÉLIA: MAKING COLOURS DANCE ACROSS BORDERS



MARION BERRIN



AMANDA THOMSEN



AURÉLIA DURAND

From the in-between to the centre, artist and writer Aurélia Durand who turned migration into a method - and joy into a language.

Writer: Lyndsay Jensen / Photographs: Various

BY THE TIME you encounter the work of Aurélia Durand, you often feel it before you fully take it in.

The colours arrive first - bold, energetic, and confident. Then come the figures: bodies in motion, faces open and calm, eyes meeting yours. There is joy here, but it is not surface-level. It feels intentional and lived-in. The images do not ask for attention; they make space. They allow people to exist fully, without explanation.

For Aurélia, that space has always been important. Raised between France and La Réunion, with family roots in Côte d'Ivoire, she learned early on that identity is not something neatly inherited, but something you move through and shape over time. Now based in Copenhagen, she has built an international practice that spans illustration, animation, murals, books, and global campaigns. Across all of it runs the same question: *what does it mean to be seen, and who gets to decide what visibility looks like?*

LEARNING TO SEE HERSELF

Aurélia did not set out to make political art. She started by drawing what was missing. As a child, she noticed the absence of images that reflected her skin, her hair, her family, or the joy she experienced within her own world. Drawing became a way to fill those gaps, a way to create images she wished had existed.

What began as something personal slowly revealed itself as something shared. Over time, she realised that many others were looking for the same reflections. Her images didn't just express identity; they reclaimed it. They offered visibility without asking for justification, and dignity without conditions.

Growing up between different places sharpened this awareness. France brought structure and discipline. La Réunion offered warmth, rhythm, and cultural layering. Her Ivorian heritage carried history, strength, and connection. Rather than trying to merge these influences into a single, fixed identity, Aurélia learned to live comfortably in between them. That sense of fluidity continues to shape her work today.

ABSENCE AND ABUNDANCE

When Aurélia talks about her childhood, she often returns to a contrast between two experiences: absence and abundance. There was the clear lack of representation - a silence that felt heavy. At the same time, there was an abundance of life around her: family gatherings, music, colour, laughter, and movement.

Her work exists in the space between these two realities. It does not deny difficulty or struggle, but it refuses to make them the centre of the story. In-

stead, Aurélia places joy at the forefront - not as an escape, but as a conscious choice. In a world that often frames Black identity through pain or hardship, her work insists on pride, tenderness, rest, and play.

This approach is closely tied to her use of colour. For Aurélia, colour is not simply decorative. It carries emotion, memory, and meaning. Painting joy is not about avoiding reality; it is about widening it and making room for more truthful, complete stories.

FINDING PERMISSION

Aurélia's formal art education took place between France and Denmark, and the contrast between the two environments had a lasting impact. France gave her a strong technical foundation. Denmark gave her something less tangible but just as important: permission.

In Danish classrooms, ideas were valued over polish. Intuition mattered. Simplifying a drawing was not seen as a failure, but as a way of communicating more clearly. For the first time, the way Aurélia naturally worked - once criticised as being "too colourful" or "too simple" - was understood as a strength.

That shift changed her relationship with her work. It allowed her to trust her instincts and recognise consistency where others had once seen excess. She began to understand that finding your voice





AURÉLIA DURAND



AURÉLIA DURAND

“PLACING JOY AT THE CENTRE OF MY WORK ISN’T AN ESCAPE FROM REALITY; IT’S A CONSCIOUS CHOICE TO WIDEN IT.”

doesn’t come from fitting into expectations, but from returning again and again to what feels honest.

THE MOVE NORTH

Aurélia originally came to Denmark to study, but what made her stay was something quieter. Copenhagen offered space - both physical and mental - to listen to herself. The stillness of the city stood in contrast to the layered noise of her upbringing, creating room for reflection and focus.

At the same time, living in Denmark meant becoming more visible. As an artist of colour, she was often one of very few. That visibility brought moments of isolation and misunderstanding, but it also clarified her sense of purpose. In places where representation is limited, intention becomes essential.

Denmark demands resilience. It pushed Aurélia to articulate why her work mattered, not only to herself but to others. She learned that resistance does not always look loud or confrontational; sometimes it takes the form of persistence and clarity.

A VOICE THAT TRAVELS

Aurélia’s practice does not stay within a single medium. She moves between illustration, animation, murals, publishing, and campaigns, treating each as a different language. While the formats change, the voice remains recognisable: movement, warmth, presence.

This consistency is what led to wider recognition. When the publisher *Quarto Kids* discovered her work online, they recognised a visual language that was already telling stories clearly and powerfully. This led to her collaboration on *This Book Is Anti-Racist*, which became a #1 *New York Times* bestseller.

For Aurélia, the project was about more than professional success. It felt aligned. The book confirmed that illustration could be accessible, political, and widely understood without losing care or warmth. It reinforced her belief that images shape how we see ourselves and others - and that art is never neutral.

WRITING BELONGING

This ongoing exploration of identity and visibility also led Aurélia to write her own book, *Belonging*. In it, she turns her attention more directly to questions of home, identity, and what it means to belong when your life stretches across cultures and borders.

Rather than offering clear answers, *Belonging* invites reflection. It speaks to those who live between places, languages, or expectations, and asks how we carry ourselves through those spaces. Like her visual work, the book is thoughtful, open, and grounded in lived experience.

PROCESS WITHOUT RULES

Despite the clarity of her finished work, Aurélia’s creative process is flexible and intuitive. Ideas often come from everyday life - a conversation, a walk, something she reads or watches. She may write or sketch without knowing where it will lead. Colour usually comes later, once the feeling is clear.

Some ideas take years to develop. Others arrive suddenly and demand immediate attention. She allows time to play its role, revisiting experiences until something shifts. When it does, the work often comes quickly.

Aurélia avoids rigid systems. For her, creativity loses meaning when it becomes overly controlled. Uncertainty, delay, and confusion are not obstacles; they are part of the process.

FILLING THE GAPS

Early in her education, Aurélia often felt disconnected from the art world. She didn’t see herself reflected in references, subjects, or authority figures. At times, it felt as though art itself wasn’t meant for her.

Creating became a way forward. Through repetition, she rebuilt her relationship with identity, turning it from something she felt she had to explain into something she could celebrate. Filling gaps in representation became necessary - not only for audiences who finally saw themselves reflected, but for her own sense of belonging.

When her work was sometimes described as “too political,” Aurélia took it as a

lesson rather than a warning. Neutrality, she learned, is a privilege. Instead of softening her voice, she chose honesty. Over time, her confidence grew, and the tensions around her work began to fade.

COMMUNITY AS CONVERSATION

Although much of Aurélia's work happens alone, she does not see her practice as solitary. Community plays a central role. Her work is a conversation - one that continues through exhibitions, collaborations, and especially online.

On Instagram, she shares not only finished pieces but thoughts and reflections. Messages from people who recognise themselves in her work continue to affirm its purpose. For Aurélia, representation is relational. It only gains meaning through connection.

BEYOND GEOGRAPHY

As her career evolves, Aurélia's focus continues to expand. She is writing more, painting, and thinking deeply about belonging beyond physical location. The question is no longer only where we come from, but how we move through the world - emotionally, culturally, and creatively.

She is also attentive to the role of art in a time shaped by artificial intelligence. *If images can be generated instantly, what gives art value?* For Aurélia, the answer lies in intention and vulnerability. Art's future, she believes, will centre on what cannot be automated: lived experience, emotional honesty, and joy that feels real.

LIFE, LIGHTNESS, AND LOOKING AHEAD

Outside the studio, Aurélia finds inspiration in watching her son grow. Parenthood has softened her outlook, bringing lightness and perspective. Through him, she experiences hope with renewed clarity.

Living in Denmark has changed her - not by erasing her differences, but by strengthening her acceptance of them. Adapting to a new culture required courage, but it also built confidence. Distance, she believes, can be transformative. If possible, everyone should experience life away from where they were raised.

Her advice to young artists who don't see themselves reflected is practical and generous: your story is not a limitation. Stay persistent. Let failure teach you. Allow your dreams to change. And keep moving - because giving up is never the answer.

From France to La Réunion, from Côte d'Ivoire to Copenhagen, Aurélia has turned movement into method. Her work does not ask for permission. It exists fully - vibrant, assured, and deeply human - inviting us not just to look, but to see differently.

To explore more of Aurélia's work, visit her [website](#) where illustration, animation, and personal projects sit side by side as part of an ongoing visual narrative. She also shares new work, process, and reflections on identity and creativity through her [Instagram](#), where her practice continues as a conversation with a global community.



AURÉLIA DURAND



AURÉLIA DURAND



ALEX HEUVINK

THE SCANDINAVIAN #FORGOTTENGOLD

In this issue, **Aamna Tauheed** examines the lack of recognition of the international talent pool in Denmark and across Scandinavia.



UNSPASH

TODAY, IT IS common for people to move to other countries for better employment, education, and a better quality of life. Focusing specifically on the Nordic region, according to the [latest figures \(2022\)](#) from the Nordic co-operation, there are almost 3.5 million internationals living in the Nordic countries.

Among all Nordic countries, Denmark continues to position itself as a global hub for innovation and sustainability. Similarly, its work-life balance, free education, and social security attract international talent to move to Denmark. Recent statistics (2022) indicate a significant increase in international moves to Denmark, almost double that of previous years.

THE BEGINNING OF THE MOVEMENT

The largest migration to Denmark has caused difficulties for internationals who came in hopes of better employment in the Danish labour market

and greater inclusivity in Danish society, yet remain invisible and struggle to survive. Many internationals arrive with higher education, professional skills, global experience, and a strong desire to add value to the Danish job market, but only a few secure professional jobs after years of struggle. Language barrier, informal recruitment networks, and limited recognition of international qualifications frequently prevent skilled professionals from entering roles aligned with their capabilities.

To highlight the gap between international perceptions of Denmark and reality, *The International Denmark* launched #TheForgottenGold Movement. Our platform calls international talent “forgotten gold,” which already exists in the country but is overlooked and remains invisible in Denmark despite their higher education and professional experience.

Through this movement, our digital and print editions have published several stories about tal-

ented internationals seeking visibility in the Danish job market. They share their experience navigating Danish life and the challenges of the Danish labour market as internationals. Through this movement, many respondents also shared how they could add value to Danish society and companies through their professional and social experience. The powerful words of a participant from Denmark in #TheForgottenGold Movement explicitly reflect the situation of internationals. While sharing her story, she said:

“People like me, educated, skilled, and multilingual, have been in this country for years. I am willing to contribute and aware of my professional capabilities and where I can add value to the company. I only need one opportunity and a chance to prove myself.”

STARTING OVER - AND STARTING AGAIN

#TheForgottenGold Movement is more than a

hashtag. It's a voice that demands better hiring practices, integration policies, and greater recognition of the challenges faced by international talent living in Nordic countries. It aims to highlight the need for the system to shift and for policies to be redesigned so that nationals and internationals can grow together and bridge the gap between them. Furthermore, this movement's mission is to confront a quieter reality: thousands of highly qualified international professionals living in Scandinavia remain underutilised and need the country's support for integration and employment.

The movement has attracted significant attention and recognition nationwide. It is now expanding across Scandinavia to amplify the voices of internationals living elsewhere in the Nordic region. The expansion also reflects that the challenges faced by internationals are not confined to Denmark only but are shared across Scandinavia. This is why the upcoming edition of our newspaper also covers the stories of internationals living in Denmark's neighbouring countries.

Countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland enjoy a strong international reputation and are known as progressive, happy, and inclusive societies. They consistently rank among the world's most attractive countries for quality of life and are widely recognised as welfare states. They also invite international talent to live and work in their countries, but many residing in the Nordic countries are scrambling to secure a foothold.

"I came to Denmark ready to contribute," one participant who moved from India to Denmark shared, "but I quickly realised that being qualified was not always enough. What mattered was whether someone could see my value."

THE SYSTEMIC BARRIER

A clear pattern emerged as more stories were shared in #TheForgottenGold Movement. These experiences were not individual failures but systemic ones. The movement challenged the assumption that underemployment among internationals reflects a lack of competence. Instead, it highlighted how opportunity is often shaped by familiarity, networking, and unspoken norms that exclude newcomers to the system. The experience of a recent participant from Denmark in the Danish job market, shared in #TheForgottenGold story, summed up this point clearly. She said, "I think Denmark has a welcoming approach to internationals; however, it needs systemic improvement because welcoming internationals in the country and actually giving them the integration space are two different things. In my opinion and experience, this is not only confined to Denmark, but the situation is the same in Sweden, Norway and Finland because many of my friends are living there and facing the same challenges."

For this movement, she said that Initiatives like #TheForgottenGold matter to her because they reveal the systemic gap and highlight the struggles of internationals living in Denmark. She described it as a movement for change and a voice for internationals seeking visibility and professional opportunities in Denmark. "There are so many skilled internationals who are invisible here. They are not incompetent or underqualified; they're just stuck between systems that don't connect. This is a good

"INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS ARE NOT JUST WORKERS—THEY ARE STRATEGIC ASSETS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY, AND FAILING TO INTEGRATE THEM IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION AND COMPETITIVENESS."



country, but I want to see it live up to the values it represents — inclusion, equality, opportunity."

THE IMPACT

For international professionals living in Denmark, the impact of #theForgottenGold Movement has been tangible and positive. Participants reported that the movement's visibility has boosted their confidence and motivation. Their published stories have also built trust and made them more credible to recruiters. Beyond recognition, the movement has developed a sense of community and connectivity. Many international professionals navigate the labour market in isolation, lacking access to informal networks that are crucial to hiring and career progression. By creating space for shared experiences and dialogue, the movement has reduced that isolation and encouraged collective advocacy.

INTERNATIONALS ARE NECESSARY AND BENEFICIAL

International professionals bring more than technical expertise and experience. They also bring global perspectives, cross-cultural competence, multilingual communication skills, and international networks. These qualities are strategic assets in the global economy. If companies in Scandinavia did not allow them to work and integrate, retaining international talent would be difficult, if not impossible. This tight-fisted approach to international hiring creates a significant dent in claims of equal opportunity and cultural diversity and represents a missed opportunity for innovation and competitiveness.

Scandinavian countries are often praised for their commitment to equality and inclusion, but the experiences shared through #TheForgottenGold Movement reveal a different story. Inclusion should not exist only in policy statements or be used mere-

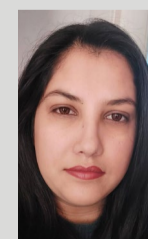
ly as a marketing strategy to build a country's image. It must be reflected in recruitment processes, workplace culture, and access to leadership and growth opportunities.

Although Denmark promotes diversity and inclusion, both the system and the people will always perceive us as 'others' in their country. They design career guidance programs for the international community, but hesitate to offer equal professional opportunities. I am not complaining or criticising anyone, but I would like to understand how the system works here for international candidates. The system should be more open and welcoming; otherwise, don't invite internationals to your country to study or work," said one of the movement's respondents while discussing the recruitment system and opportunities to integrate into Nordic society.

As 2026 unfolds, #TheForgottenGold Movement continues to evolve from a nationwide initiative into a Nordic one. Its expansion and growing recognition reflect that visibility is the first step toward inclusivity, a necessary foundation for contribution. International gold is present in the country and is awaiting recognition.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Aamna Tauheed is a Denmark-based copywriter and communications specialist with a strong background in business communications. Passionate about storytelling, she writes compelling content that amplifies brands and drives positive change.



FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CAREER IN 2026

Leslea Petersen shares key insights on staying relevant, visible, and employable in Denmark's 2026 job market.



KIRILL_MAKES_PICS - PIXABAY

DENMARK CONTINUES TO rank among the world's most attractive destinations for international professionals, known for its strong economy, high quality of life, and non-hierarchical workplaces. But as the world of work evolves, so does Denmark's job market. Digital transformation, green innovation, demographic shifts, and new immigration rules are reshaping how and where people work.

For internationals aiming to build a long-term career here, futureproofing is no longer optional. In 2026, success will depend on adaptability, local insight, and a strategic approach to your job search. To do that, it's essential to understand what's driving change in the Danish job market and where new opportunities are emerging.

UNDERSTANDING THE MARKET

To future-proof your career, you first need to understand what you are navigating. Denmark's job market is increasingly driven by knowledge-intensive industries, with sectors such as IT, life sciences, renewable energy, engineering, fintech, and data analytics continuing to experience skills shortages. At the same time, automation and AI are transforming roles across finance, logistics, manufacturing, and customer service, creating both challenges and new opportunities.

Future-proofing your career starts with recognizing where demand is growing. Employers are looking for transferable skills such as problem-solving, data literacy, digital collaboration and innovation. International professionals who pivot or adapt their profiles to these trends are more likely to secure interviews, even as roles evolve.

Once you understand where the Danish job mar-

ket is heading, the next step is to focus on the skills that will keep you competitive. Employers in Denmark value professionals who can adapt, upskill, and think critically, no matter their field.

HERE ARE A FEW AREAS WORTH FOCUSING ON IN 2026

DIGITAL LITERACY: Digital skills are no longer limited to tech roles. Fundamental data analysis, AI awareness, cybersecurity literacy, and digital project management are increasingly expected across professions. Familiarity with tools like cloud platforms, automation software, and collaborative digital systems can significantly boost your job prospects.

GREEN SKILLS: Denmark is a global leader in sustainability and the green transition, with ambitious climate goals influencing nearly every industry. Knowledge of ESG reporting, sustainable supply chains, energy efficiency, and environmental compliance is becoming highly valuable.

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION: Whether you manage a team or not, showing initiative and teamwork is highly valued. This could even be through volunteering while job searching, so make sure to highlight it on your LinkedIn and CV.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING: Keep your skills fresh through online courses, workshops, and learning the local language. Even improving your Danish a little each week can make a big difference in how connected you feel and how employers see your commitment.

THREE THINGS TO LEARN THIS YEAR

- A new digital tool or software relevant to your field.
- Basic Danish phrases to help you connect locally.
- A professional skill that strengthens your long-term career goals.

Developing these skills is only part of the picture. To truly stand out in Denmark's competitive job market, you also need to make sure people know who you are and what you bring to the table. That's where your personal brand comes in.

BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND IN DENMARK

Now, more than ever, you need to stand out in the job market. In a small, relationship-driven market like Denmark, visibility matters. Make networking your top priority in 2026! Many jobs in Denmark are filled through referrals and personal connections, so building genuine relationships can open doors that job portals can't. And keep commenting on LinkedIn, the algorithms love it, and it helps you share your expertise and knowledge with the people who need to see it. Consistency is key, so show up regularly, share your insights, and let your personality shine through. The more authentic and engaged you are, the more memorable you become to potential employers.

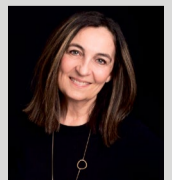
Future-proofing your career in Denmark isn't about doing everything at once; it's about steady progress. Keep learning, stay visible, and build your network. Recruiters, hiring managers and potential employers need to know you're out there, and that only happens when you show up online and make those connections work for you.

So, as you step into 2026, ask yourself: what's one small step I can take this month to invest in my future career, and who can I connect with to make it happen?

ABOUT THE WRITER

Leslea Petersen is the CEO of English Job Denmark, helping professionals and businesses retain international talent.

With 20+ years in communications, she is passionate about diversity, recruitment, and supporting inclusive workplaces.



PESTO & GRUYÈRE TWISTS

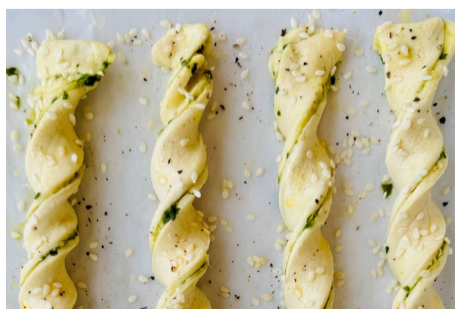
Natalia Liviero brings effortless charm to these pesto-and-cheese puff pastry twists, combining flaky pastry with savoury pesto and melted cheese. Perfect for sharing with friends, they're easier than they look and well worth making.



PESTO & GRUYÈRE TWISTS (Makes approximately 12)

Ingredients:

2 x 200g puff pastry
60g basil pesto
60g Gruyère (or any hard cheese), grated
1 egg, whisked
Pepper
Sesame seeds



NOTES:

*Replace the basil pesto with any pesto flavour of your choice.

*The twists can be made a few hours ahead of time and stored, covered, in the fridge until ready to bake.

*The twists can be frozen at point 9. Bake from frozen for a few extra minutes until golden brown.

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C and line a large baking tray with baking paper.
2. Place the first layer of puff pastry on a hard kitchen surface (I place a layer of clingfilm over the surface for easy cleaning after preparation).
3. Spread the pesto over the surface of the puff pastry.
4. Sprinkle the cheese over the pesto.
5. Carefully place the second layer of puff pastry over the pesto cheese layer.
6. With a sharp knife, cut 1-1.5cm vertical strips.
7. Now, one by one, carefully lift each strip and, holding one end in each hand, twist to make a spiral. Pinch the ends together (and fold over if need be) before placing them on the baking tray, leaving 4cm gaps between each one.
8. Brush the whisked egg wash over each spiral twist.
9. Sprinkle sesame seeds and a generous grating of black pepper over each one.
10. Bake for approximately 22 minutes until golden brown and risen.
11. Best eaten warm. You can add an extra drizzle of pesto and a grating of cheese just before serving for a more intense flavour.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Natalia Liviero is a South African pastry chef with Croatian heritage and a passion for European patisserie. She spends her days crafting recipes, sparring with her cats, and sharing her pastry journey on Instagram [@natashaliviero](https://www.instagram.com/natashaliviero).



KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

As Denmark's towns and regional labour markets come to rely on international workers, **Kelly Draper Rasmussen** examines the people keeping them viable.

THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE about Danish immigration is that internationals are concentrated in the major cities. For instance, Copenhagen's population is approximately one in four internationals, which attracts considerable attention. The fact that many communities outside major cities also have a high proportion of international residents and workers is often overlooked.

We will examine three communities in Denmark, how they have changed since the pandemic, and how internationals are contributing. Three models are emerging: manufacturing hubs reliant on Eastern European labour, border economies powered by cross-border commuters, and industrial towns where international workers have become the backbone of production.

HERNING

Since the onset of the pandemic, the working-age population has remained essentially stable. This is remarkable because more than 1,000 working-age people have left or retired during that period. Currently, 12% of the working-age population comprises international workers. The top international nationalities among working nationals are Polish, Romanian, Ukrainian, Syrian, and German. There are nearly 6,000 of these international workers in industries such as education, health, agriculture, retail, construction, and cleaning. Without these workers, factories and building sites would shut down, and public services would be massively understaffed.

SØNDERBORG

Further south, near the German border, we find that, despite more than 2,000 working-age people moving or retiring, the population of Sønderborg is increasing. This is because 17% of working-age residents in Sønderborg have international backgrounds. Over five thousand resident workers are foreign nationals, but digging a little deeper, we find something fascinating: over a thousand workers in Sønderborg commute from across the border. These are mostly German passport holders. In fact, there are more German commuters than Polish residents. They do not appear in population statistics, but without them, Sønderborg would find it challenging to remain operational.

The industries that international firms are sustaining are public services, tourism, retail, cleaning, and construction. People are coming from all over the world to work in Sønderborg, but as in Herning, we find that the lion's share are from Poland, Romania, Syria and Ukraine.



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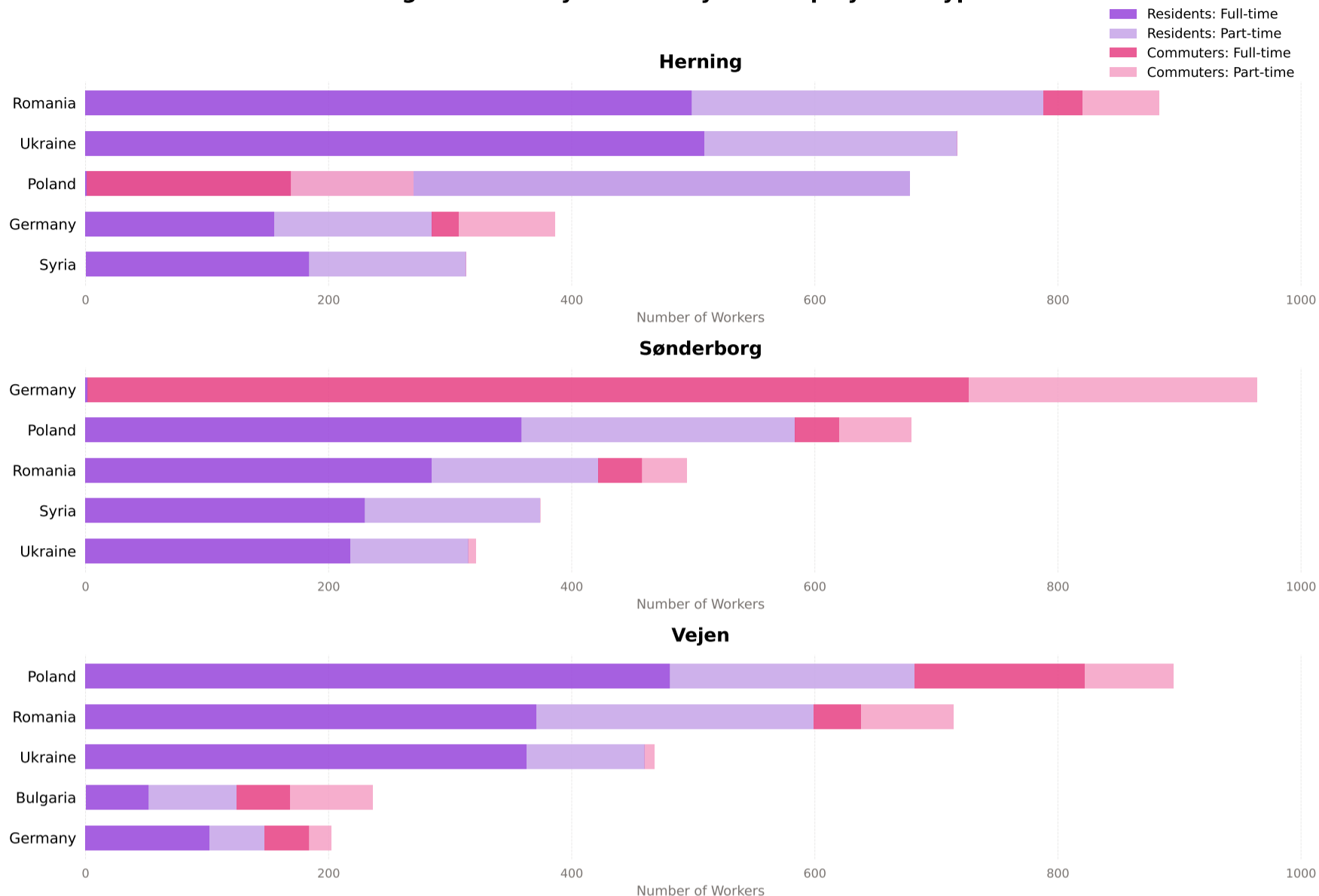


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Foreign Workers by Nationality and Employment Type



Top 5 foreign nationalities by total workers (residents + cross-border commuters) | Q3 2025

VISUALISATION BY KELLY RASMUSSEN (DATA FROM JOBINDSATS.DK)

“THE LIGHTS STAY ON NOT BY CHANCE, BUT BECAUSE THOUSANDS OF INTERNATIONAL WORKERS SHOW UP EVERY DAY.”

The daycare workers’ union BUPL recently recognised Sønderborg for bucking a national trend by increasing the ratio of trained daycare workers in nurseries and kindergartens. That would never have been affordable without the substantial replacement of Danish workers (not to mention that many of the workers themselves have international backgrounds).

VEJEN

In contrast with the other two cities, Vejen’s population has decreased since the pandemic. (Nearly 700 working-age Danes have either moved or retired). Fortunately for that community, nearly 650 international workers have moved there. 15% of working-

age residents are international. They also have just over 600 cross-border commuters.

They come from Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Syria. The manufacturing industry dominates: more than a quarter of international workers are employed in Vejen’s factories. Just under one in six work in Agriculture.

Without these international workers, factories would have to close, and the working-age population would decline by 10%.

The reason that no one is discussing this significant shift in Danish demographics is puzzling. In order to be able to plan for success, these communities need to be recognised for how they have developed since the pandemic. Perhaps there is reticence to acknowledge ‘replacement’, as this might worry Danish people that their country is being taken over, or perhaps there is distaste for recognising the contributions of outsiders. After all, it is an election cycle year, so cynical populism has become politically dominant again.

Whatever prevents policymakers and public commentators from discussing the development does

not alter the fact that it has occurred. International workers are keeping the lights on in many Danish communities. If we want them to keep doing that, we need to stop acting like they are invisible, interchangeable spare parts ‘arbejdskraft’ and finally recognise that they are whole human beings with families, aspirations and a stake in the communities they are sustaining.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Kelly Draper Rasmussen is a Denmark-based data analyst who makes complex immigration and labour data accessible through her Data in Denmark newsletter. Her research has informed national policies and supports international communities.



A NEW YEAR AND YEARLY TRADITIONS

As familiar rituals return, **Monika Pedersen** shares how school traditions become meaningful signposts in the rhythm of the academic year.



KAROLINAGRABOWSKA - PIXABAY

THE NEW YEAR begins with the traditional practice of making New Year's resolutions. This is a celebrated activity in which many people set goals or targets to improve their path or pursue a dream.

Such traditions for celebrating life serve as signposts of the passage of time over the course of a year. This practice is often followed in schools. It provides students with highlights throughout the year and often inspires and delights them.

Teachers often start the year by asking students to reflect on their achievements to date and to consider areas in which they wish to grow or improve. Older students often set targets to hone skills they need to be more successful in their studies. With younger children, goal setting is simpler and often involves pastoral elements, such as becoming a better friend or a class helper. These goals are often shared as part of a wall display featuring a tree, with each child's hopes written on a leaf or within the structure of a hot-air balloon. There are so many options, but the very visual aspect allows children to return to the display and remind themselves of their endeavours.

YEARLY TRADITIONS

Once January fades away, many Danish schools celebrate the tradition of 'Fastelavn' in late February. It is a carnival tradition observed in Scandinavian countries to mark the start of Lent.

At school, it means dressing up and enjoying

the ancient tradition of 'beating a cat out of a barrel', which represents the removal of bad spirits in preparation for Easter. These days, the barrel is full of sweets and the one who manages to smash down the hanging barrel shares the goodies with the rest of the class. Special pastries are also enjoyed!

Valentine's Day may also be celebrated. In the younger classes, this provides an opportunity to reconnect with pastoral affairs by having children exchange hearts with warm, loving messages written for each other.

March brings with it the start of Spring, and either March or April heralds Easter with Easter egg hunts and the joy of shaking off the greyness of Winter. The clocks switch and the longer days bring both students and teachers a new lease of life and energy!

May in the Danish calendar is a time of many public holidays, so the weeks are short and it is a time to have longer weekends spent travelling to summer houses to enjoy family time and outdoor activities.

For older students, it is the exam period and the end of their studies, and the beginning of looking forward to the next stage of their academic journey.

By June, half a year has evaporated, and younger students are looking forward to their long awaited holidays. It is often a time of transition with many mobile families leaving for a new assignment in a new country. This is a bittersweet time, so a big emphasis is placed on 'giving closure' through 'goodbye'

parties, cards, and play dates.

July is a time for rest and recuperation.

August starts with a newness and a distinct energy. It is a time for making new friends, meeting new teachers, and learning new routines.

September is the time for bonding. After the freshness of a new academic year, it is vital to support a class in seeing themselves as a group. There is no better way of securing this than an overnight trip with specific outdoor team-building activities, making dinner together, and camping or a night at a youth hostel.

And before long, it is time for a break, quickly followed by one of the biggest dates on the calendar, Halloween. The excitement of dressing up and going 'trick or treating' is foremost for almost all students, irrespective of age!

November is often marked by many internationals with the huge celebration of a Fall Festival and Thanksgiving. For Danes, it is the start of the 'Hygge' season. *Hygge* is all about being cosy, comfortable, and coping with the darkness by indulging in simple treats such as hot chocolate with friends, beautiful candles, and enjoying delicious and hearty winter dishes.

And then in a flash, it is December, which brings with it the tradition of making Advent candle decorations to mark the countdown to Christmas Eve. A candle is lit each Sunday to mark the occasion.

At school, a primary classroom needs an Advent calendar, so each child can enjoy a treat of some kind. It also involves the children decorating their classroom with festive colours and creations to reflect the magic of the season.

TIME FLIES WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN

The start of the year brings the prospect of lots of time and opportunities. This is true! However, it is quite incredible how quickly the time passes, and the new year celebrations are being enjoyed, again!

ABOUT THE WRITER

Monika Pedersen is an international educator with extensive leadership experience across the UK, Germany, and Denmark. She brings deep expertise in international and Danish school systems, with a continued passion for teaching and learning.



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR BODY

Fiona L Smith reflects on rest as wisdom, and how listening inward offers a gentler way to begin the year.



STOCKSNAP - PIXABAY

WHAT A PRESSURE for the first month of the year! January has a reputation for demanding fresh starts, new intentions and routines, and SO many goals. The whole month is synonymous with resolutions, and culturally there's a belief that we should start the year raring to go, back at full speed after the Christmas holidays.

The reality for many people is very different. January feels heavy rather than energising; there's lingering fatigue and low motivation, and you might feel heavy, slow and foggy. It can feel as though you've failed before you've even begun.

But this isn't due to a lack of discipline or willpower and is *definitely* not a personal failing. It's your body giving you important information through the language of the nervous system. It's asking for something very specific – rest and time.

WHY JANUARY IS HARDER FOR SOME

People who tend towards shut-down or withdrawal when under stress often experience January more intensely. In somatic terms, this pattern is known as dorsal vagal collapse, or 'freeze'. When life is overwhelming, the system slows everything down to conserve energy and protect itself.

December is full of conditions that push the nervous system beyond its capacity. Too much socialising and sensory overload, too many obligations, heightened emotions, disrupted routines and financial pressure. For some, it's simply *too much, too fast, too soon*, which is how Dr Peter Levine defines trauma.

Others arrive in January already depleted after months, or even years, of running on empty. There's too little rest, too little support and too little time to recover, which can lead to fatigue and shutdown.

RETHINKING TRAUMA

Trauma is often misunderstood. It is commonly associated with extreme or catastrophic events, but this isn't always the case. Dr Levine defines trauma as anything that overwhelms the nervous system's capacity to cope. It's not about events themselves, but about whether the system had enough time, support, and

“JANUARY FATIGUE ISN'T SOMETHING TO FIX - IT'S SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO.”

resources to process what happened. If *your* system didn't have sufficient time or resources, it's not a 'failure'.

Trauma can arise from experiences that were 'too much'; it can also come from situations where there was too little, for too long - emotional neglect or abuse or prolonged pressure without relief; all leading to chronic, stored stress. As physician and author Gabor Maté puts it, trauma is not what happened to you, but what happened inside you as a result of what happened.

PUSHING THROUGH ISN'T THE ANSWER

When you feel exhausted, foggy, flat, or unmotivated in January, your nervous system may be signalling a need for deep rest and integration because chances are, this isn't just about what happened in December. Shut-down isn't laziness – it's a protective state that slows things down when pushing through would cause more harm. It's the body saying, “I need time to process and integrate what has already happened.”

When we override signals and symptoms and force ourselves to keep going, we add more stress to a system that's already overloaded. Over time, this pattern often leads to burnout. January resolution culture promotes willpower as the solution – stick to the resolution, go to the gym no matter how tired you feel; push through the resistance. For a nervous system already under strain, this approach reinforces the very stress pattern it is trying to resolve. Regulation needs to come *before* productivity, not the other way around.

NURTURING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Rather than forcing change, January can be a time to offer the nervous system space, time and small signals of nourishment and ease that signal connection and settling; reminders to the body that life isn't all effort, productivity, and responsibility. What matters most is choosing experiences that genuinely feel resourcing – moments of ease, pleasure, wonder, or beauty that soften or energise rather than over-stimulate.

American psychologist Deb Dana calls these moments glimmers. They are often simple and ordinary: a walk in winter light, a cup of tea with a friend, curling up by the fire with a book, dancing as though no one is watching, or creativity with no outcome in mind. In Denmark, the idea of *hygge* captures this beautifully – time alone or with others that feels cosy, warm, and unforced. No agenda, no productivity, just ease.

Ask yourself what brings you moments of quiet joy. Not what you think you *should* enjoy, but what genuinely softens something inside you. January fatigue isn't something to fix; it's something to listen to. When we meet the body with patience and compassion rather than pressure, energy returns in its own time.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Fiona L Smith is a Somatic Therapist, Coach & Nervous System expert who supports women to heal from burnout & anxiety and reclaim ease and confidence. UK born, she lives in Rødovre with her family and loves walking, winter dips, and sunshine.



CLARITY AS CORE TO EVERYTHING

With mysticism on the rise and uncertainty in the air, **Ophelia Wu** examines why cultivating clarity may be the only true anchor in the year ahead.

IF THE BUZZWORD for 2025 was “authenticity”, then for 2026 it will be “clarity”. It makes sense. When everyone is searching for who they truly are and striving to live an authentic life (whatever that means), things are bound to get chaotic and messy before the anchor lands solidly. The constant questioning and exploration of the self brings up many sides and aspects of us, whether we’re aware of them or not. The natural next step is clarity. Clarity is core to everything. In philosophy, religion, relationships, careers, and even what we wear every day, clarity is the guiding light that elevates our ability to navigate life.

2026: THE YEAR AHEAD

I’m not an astrologer or feng shui master, but like many curious souls, I like to explore what the coming year may hold. In Chinese metaphysics, 2026 marks the Year of the Fire Horse and the start of the 9th period of the Three Cycles and Nine Periods system, a 20-year phase within a much larger 180-year energy cycle. This period is governed by the fire element, suggesting that things will move and change extremely fast, often in explosive and unpredictable ways.

In Western astrology, we are also witnessing the end of major planetary cycles, as Saturn, Neptune, and other planets complete decade-long journeys through one sign and move into the next. Numerology marks 2026 as a Year of 1, a powerful universal year symbolising global resets and new innovations. Across different schools of spirituality and mystical systems, the message is consistent: we are entering a period of rapid change, growth, and spiritual awakening.

These cosmic and numerological cycles mirror the growing human desire for guidance and understanding, which helps explain why mysticism is gaining popularity today. What was once a hush-hush or niche practice, even dismissed in the past as “witchcraft”, is now being rediscovered and embraced, even entering mainstream culture. Consider Christian Dior, who was famously superstitious and fascinated by astrology and tarot. These elements have long influenced his designs and remain present in runway shows today.

THE HUNT FOR AN ANSWER

We are seeing a significant rise in the mystic trend: tarot readings, shamanic rituals, singing bowls, astrology, and reverence for nature and animals across many cultures. Why now? The world we live in is becoming more chaotic by the day, and people no longer know where to seek comfort or an anchor. In



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ancient times, it was the church or other religions that provided this sense of guidance. Their power lay in offering holiness, forgiveness, and a greater force beyond our control. Believing that this force “had your back” gave people a sense of security and perspective. Today, many turn to mysticism for a similar purpose—the reassurance that the universe is watching over them.

I used to read tarot cards for others, and most seekers weren’t looking for miraculous solutions (although some did). They wanted understanding, perspective, and clarity about their current situation. They sought validation and guidance, and reassurance that they could navigate their path. I always told them to take it with a pinch of salt, even with what I picked up and told them.

Tarot and astrology often appear mystical, but they are largely systems of symbolism. Signs, houses, and cards represent emotions, themes, and patterns in life. A skilled reader taps into your energy, inter-

prets what is happening, and provides insight. The cards themselves guide the reader, revealing your current state of mind and energy. True practitioners do not even need the tools to understand your energy. However, tapping into someone else’s energy is not trivial. It can entangle yours with theirs, affecting natural paths and karmic trajectories.

Good readers or spiritual guides operate with integrity, offer honest feedback and constructive suggestions to support your growth, but they do not solve your problems. What they provide is clarity—a perspective from which you can make your own decisions.

In times of uncertainty, it is natural to want answers more than ever. Everyone wants to know why and how to resolve difficulties. The popularity of these practices reflects both demand and supply: people want to learn these skills out of curiosity, personal growth, or the hope of answers. Some discover the power of this “ability” and may use it to build a



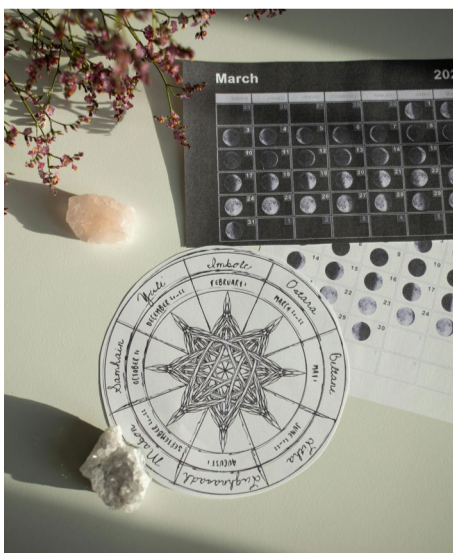
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business. But not everyone is genuine. Some do it for ego, control, or to feel superior. Seeking answers and solutions is also a form of control: we are too afraid to have faith in life and the universe, and we want to know what is going to happen and how to tackle it step by step. This is controlling, and it comes from the reluctance to surrender, because to surrender and let life unfold is scary, the space of uncertainty and change is unpleasant.

By all means, read astrology updates, explore tarot, or engage with whatever mystical practice draws you. But the clarity that genuinely matters is knowing why you are pursuing it and understanding how honourable the healer or reader truly is. This is a very delicate and potentially dangerous realm: there are no certificates, no proof, and no universal benchmark. It is also not a case of “the higher the price, the better.”

Many genuine practitioners are often reluctant to go public and never advertise themselves. For them, this work is not about making money; it is a beautiful encounter that the spirits bring them to, allowing them to offer guidance or support at a particular point in someone’s life. A reader or healer’s energy and intention matter enormously. If they are not clear and pure, they can directly entangle yours, and instead of gaining the clarity you seek, you may find yourself caught in an even messier web of energy that does not belong to you or to them.

The danger is even greater when ego-driven individuals take online courses, learn a few techniques, and start offering readings to others. They may do it to



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feel superior, inflate their status, or make money, without fully understanding the responsibility of handling someone else’s energy. The more commercialised or performative it becomes, the lower the likelihood that it is being approached with pure intentions. Understanding this distinction is essential: clarity is not just about seeking answers, it is about discerning intention, integrity, and energy.

CLARITY IN PRACTICE

This is why clarity is central. When your mind is messy and your compass is lost, you instinctively seek guidance to illuminate the path. With clarity, these practices become side notes. You simply know life will work out, even when it temporarily feels uncertain. My spiritual and Buddhist practice has shown me that navigating life elegantly, or resisting being swayed by chaos, depends on clarity. It does not require Plato-level contemplation. You just need to be clear on three things:

- #1 Embrace change as the only constant – see it as a guide, an opportunity, not a threat; it shapes growth and perspective.
- #2 Know and honour your own path – clarity comes from understanding what truly matters to you, not what others expect, or society thinks.
- #3 Detach from outcomes – trust the process and let life unfold while staying aligned with your values.

Once these are understood, life’s unpredictability loses its power to unsettle you. Mystic trends, rituals, and readings can serve as tools or reflections, but clarity is the anchor that truly matters.

Think of clarity like standing in a thick fog. You may want to rush, deploying all the knowledge you have about geography to measure the wind and know exactly when it will lift and in which direction. But the hardest and most necessary thing is to do nothing: to trust, believe, and know that the fog will clear in its own time. Clarity is not about finding immediate solutions. It is about cultivating a calm mind, a steady perspective, and a grounded soul. Whether you consult astrology, tarot, or other mystical guidance, the more clarity you have, the sharper your true compass.



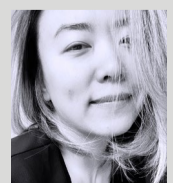
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ABOUT THE WRITER

Ophelia Wu is a Copenhagen-based fashion consultant, journalist, with a career spanning Hong Kong, London, and beyond. She brings her passion for fashion, beauty, and interiors to brands worldwide while embracing the Scandinavian lifestyle.



STRENGTH TRAINING

This issue, **Alexandra Beck** reframes strength training as a long-term health strategy, not a passing fitness trend.



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IF THERE IS one thing I wish more people understood about strength training, it is this: it is not a fitness trend. It is infrastructure.

By the time most of us reach our 40s and 50s, we are no longer asking whether exercise is “good for us”. We know it is. The real question is where to put our limited time, energy and attention in a life that already feels full.

STRENGTH TRAINING QUIETLY EARNS ITS PLACE

Strength training does not shout. It does not promise overnight transformations or demand constant reinvention. What it does is support everything else you want to keep doing well: moving confidently, recovering faster, staying resilient under stress and feeling capable in your own body as life gets busier rather than calmer.

I work with high-functioning individuals. They manage careers, families, ageing parents, travel, stress and responsibility. They are not looking for entertainment or punishment. They are looking for something that works over time.

STRENGTH DELIVERABLES

Muscle and bone are not aesthetic extras. They are health assets. Muscles support joints, posture, and balance. Bone responds to load and remains

stronger when it is consistently challenged. Together, they form the physical foundation that makes everyday life feel manageable rather than effortful.

This becomes especially important in midlife recovery changes. Sleep becomes more fragile. Stress has a bigger impact. Hormonal shifts add another layer of unpredictability. None of this means the body is failing. It simply means training needs to be intentional rather than reactive.

Strength training provides a clear signal to the body: keep this tissue, support this structure, stay capable. Cardio is valuable, movement is valuable, but without strength, there is very little for those qualities to attach to.

What often surprises people is that strength training does not require extreme effort to be effective. Two to three well-designed sessions per week are enough for most people to build and maintain strength when the training is structured and consistent. More is not always better. Better is better.

This is why strength training is such a good investment. It compounds quietly. The work you do now pays off later in fewer injuries, more stable energy, better recovery, and a body that feels trustworthy rather than unpredictable.

PAYING DIVIDENDS OUTSIDE THE GYM

People who train for strength often report coping

better with stress. They move with more confidence. They hesitate less. They recover faster from demanding weeks. These benefits are not dramatic, but they are deeply practical. Practicality is what keeps people training long-term.

There is also a mental relief that comes from strength training done well. Familiar movement patterns. Clear structure. Progress you can feel rather than chase. Training stops being something you negotiate with and becomes something that simply has a place in your week.

In a world that constantly asks us to optimise, personalise and self-direct, there is value in training that is steady, repeatable and calm.

Looking ahead to 2026, strength training will become increasingly recognised not as a fitness choice, but as a health strategy. Not because it is new, but because it works when life is not ideal. It supports ageing rather than fighting it. It respects the reality of busy lives instead of pretending they will suddenly slow down.

Strength training does not promise to stop time. It changes how time feels in your body.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

And if there is one thing I hope people take into the following year, it is this: you do not need more intensity, more variety, or more motivation. You need a structure that supports you in showing up again and again in a way that fits the life you are actually living.

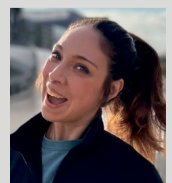
That is where real strength is built.



JONKLINE - PIXABAY

ABOUT THE WRITER

Alexandra Beck is a Swiss/Brit personal trainer and nutrition coach in Copenhagen, helping people of all ages find fun and consistency in fitness. A former communications professional, she now brings energy, and community magic to every workout.



HOW DENMARK BECAME A GLOBAL POWERHOUSE

Jess Hearne charts Denmark's evolution from Viking networks to welfare state, showing how engagement and institution-building replaced force as power.



VARBERG/ROLANDS - PIXABAY

WITH A POPULATION of little over six million people nestled away on a modest landmass in Northern Europe, one could be forgiven for overlooking Denmark as a nation with global influence. Yet, the country routinely ranks among the world's leaders in innovation, welfare, climate action and economic competitiveness. Far from being a happy accident, the nation's success is the result of thousands of years of adaptation, resilience, and strategic reinvention.

FROM VIKING MOBILITY TO A MEDIEVAL KINGDOM

The tale of how modern Denmark came to be began in the Viking Age (c. 800 – 1050 AD), when seafarers created networks that reached far beyond the confines of Scandinavia. These early modern Danes were not merely the raiders Hollywood would have us believe; they were traders, explorers, and settlers whose longships connected North America to Eastern Europe, Byzantium, and the Islamic world. These early achievements fostered trade, maritime skill, cultural exchanges and a pragmatic approach to power; traits that would endure long after the Viking age ended.

By the late Middle Ages, Denmark had transformed from a society of Viking chieftaincies into a centralised Christian monarchy. As control of the Baltic Sea became the backbone of Danish influence, Copenhagen grew from a fishing village into a strategic hub of trade and culture. Under Queen Margrethe I, Denmark, Norway and Sweden were merged into the Kalmar Union and, although it eventually dissolved, it taught Denmark an important lesson: power depended just as much on diplomacy and administration as it did on military might.

STRENGTH AND REINVENTION

The sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a period of turmoil for

Denmark as it navigated religious reformations, wars with neighbouring powers and the complex politics of northern Europe. However, the same period also proved to be formative: the nation consolidated its tax, naval and administrative structures, laying the foundations for long-term state capacity.

In the early nineteenth century, Denmark faced a profound crisis after its fatal decision to align with Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars. In just two years, the state went bankrupt and was forced to cede Norway to Sweden, crippling its economy and diminishing its status as a European power. The decisive blow came in 1864, when Prussia and Austria decisively defeated Denmark, and Schleswig-Holstein was lost. Overnight, Denmark's status as a regional power had disappeared.

But rather than pursuing revenge, Denmark saw this as an opportunity for strategic reinvention. Political elites and ordinary citizens turned inward, focusing on education, agriculture and social cohesion. In 1849, Denmark started the transition towards democratic governance with the adoption of its first constitution, embedding representative politics within the state. Farmers formed cooperatives to export meat and dairy produce, transforming Denmark into one of Europe's most efficient agricultural economies. Civil society institutions, such as cooperative banks, folk high schools and trade unions, strengthened social bonds and encouraged civic engagement. These decisions marked a turning point in Denmark's history: she had learned how to succeed without military power.

THE MODERN WELFARE STATE AND GLOBAL INTEGRATION

The most visible transformations occurred during the twentieth century. Political agreements like the 1933 Kanslergade Agreement, which expanded social security and labour protections and laid the foundation for the Nordic model of universal services, led to the emergence of Denmark's welfare state. After World War II, Denmark became a founding member of the United Nations and joined NATO in 1949, solidifying its role in international security and rejecting its long policy of neutrality. It also embraced European integration by joining the European Economic Community (now the European Union) in 1973.

Today, Denmark is defined by an open, export-oriented economy, high social trust and strong innovation, from wind energy to pharmaceuticals. The welfare state grew as an extension of long traditions such as effective institutions, education and cooperation rather than a break with the past, building an environment to support globally successful companies and reinforce Denmark's commitment to trade, innovation and international engagement.

Over time, Denmark's defining strength has been its ability to adapt. From Viking trade networks to modern democracy, the nation has a long history of choosing engagement over isolation. For internationals who call Denmark home, this history explains the traits that define the culture: pragmatism, mutual support and modest national pride.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Jess Hearne is an Irish Content &

Communications Specialist based in Copenhagen.

With a background in history and socio-political studies, she works with clients across many areas, while pursuing passion projects in feminist history and film psychology.



HOMES ROOTED IN SIMPLICITY

With sustainability and simplicity woven into everyday life, **Maja de Silva** examines how Danish homes are shaped by culture rather than trends.

I REMEMBER THE time just before my big move to Denmark.

My hopes were high, almost luminous, especially when I thought about continuing my career as an interior architect. This was the country of design. With international experience from the USA, Switzerland, and Poland, Denmark would be the perfect place to bring my profession and passion together.

Every showroom I visited confirmed my expectations. Beautiful spaces filled with stunning, high-quality furniture. Exquisite materials, tactile fabrics, and delicious, earthy tones that sparked instant inspiration. Shelves curated with elegant home accessories, lighting designs that made my head spin with possibilities—everything felt exciting, almost intoxicating. I couldn't wait to start creating: selecting the right pieces, choosing wall colours, planning floor layouts, and developing custom solutions to craft deeply personal, meaningful spaces for my future Danish clients.

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Arriving here, I became a learner again—curious and open. I wanted to understand this new country: its culture, preferences, subtle differences in taste, and the needs and dreams that shape Danish homes. I spent countless hours researching: visiting websites, browsing catalogues, connecting with people and vendors, engaging in conversations, and discovering design profiles across social media.

Over the next few months, I slowly began to understand how things truly work here. And the lesson came with a surprising twist—almost a slight cultural shock. Interior design, at least the version of it that I had imagined, wasn't as prominent here as I expected. The “idea” of Danish design I carried with me was different from the reality I encountered.

UNDERSTANDING DANISH INTERIORS

Open a magazine and take a slow look at the photographed Danish homes—what do you see, and how does it make you feel? For me, it's an immediate sense of peace. Soft, settled tones. Simple textures. Natural light fills the room without effort - a design piece with history, an icon that quietly tells a story. Perhaps one painted wall in a gentle pastel shade, a few posters placed thoughtfully on the walls. Everything is simple and beautiful.

There is a cosy lightness to it all. Nothing feels forced or overly curated. Nothing pretends to be perfect. Second-hand furniture is not just accepted; it's celebrated. Kitchens are often old and white, bathrooms too—tiled with classic 10×10 squares. Floors are wooden panels, natural and practical, bringing warmth into everyday life.

It's all rooted in sustainability. Things, furniture, and entire interiors are made to last. They don't change simply because fashion trends say so. Danish homes are far from the “fast life.” When you move into an older apartment, there is no rush to tear things down just because they're out of date. Handcrafted pieces are valued for their longevity. There is genuine appreciation for quality—for items built years ago that still serve beautifully today. Good design is thoughtful, conscious, and treasured.

Of course, there is room to make a home your own: a touch of wall colour, a piece of art, something meaningful. Danes enjoy decorating their own spaces in simple ways, always with a feeling of *hygge*. Add a cosy blanket and a couple of throw pillows, and light a candle. Sometimes a larger, colourful wool rug becomes the perfect anchor of warmth and personality.

Windows invite in every possible ray of natural light. They're rarely covered—curtains, if present at all, are often natural, white, or softly tinted, made from translucent fabrics. Even the layout of rooms tends to stay the same. Why change what already works? And truth be told, altering walls can be pretty expensive, or sometimes not allowed by the municipality.

“The idea of Danish design I carried with me was different from the reality I encountered - and that difference became my greatest lesson.”



DESIGNER/PHOTOGRAPHER: MAJA DE SILVA / LOCATION: PRIVATE HOUSE



DESIGNER/PHOTOGRAPHER: MAJA DE SILVA / LOCATION: CAKE CREATIONS



DESIGNER/PHOTOGRAPHER: MAJA DE SILVA / LOCATION: PRIVATE HOUSE



DESIGNER/PHOTOGRAPHER: MAJA DE SILVA / LOCATION: NONNA CAFE

“It’s not about trends or perfection, but about living simply, consciously, and beautifully.”

This is how I’ve come to understand and feel Danish interiors. I’ve learned so much from this approach. It’s not about showing off. It’s not about chasing the newest trends. It’s about living in the moment—cosy, beautiful, grateful. It’s about embracing simplicity, authenticity, and the gentle charm of imperfections.

THE NEW

Newly built homes on the market today feel like an actual blank canvas. White walls, often white kitchens, bathrooms tiled in soft grey or beige, and—of course—wooden floors. Everything is clean, fresh, and ready to be shaped. You can style these spaces however you wish, and the modern Scandinavian look is undeniably a strong trend. But it’s important to remember where this aesthetic comes from: functional simplicity, minimalism, understated elegance, and timeless quality designs.

These homes invite you to create your own atmosphere while still echoing the essence of Scandinavian living.

EMBRACING THE CULTURE

As I mentioned earlier, it was surprising—and in many ways humbling—to discover how differently the role of an interior architect is perceived in Denmark. Despite the worldwide fame of Danish Design, finding my professional place here was not as straightforward as I once imagined. As an expat, adapting to this landscape required time, determination, and patience. I had to study the market, learn its rhythm, and understand the deeper cultural values that shape Danish interiors.

Today, I embrace those lessons and this journey. Now, I help internationals who are settling in Denmark create homes that feel both familiar and new. Homes that are cosy, practical, personal—spaces where their individual design tastes blend naturally with Scandinavian aesthetics. It’s always an intriguing mix, and every project becomes a unique reflection of the people who live in it.

Each space tells its own story. And that, to me, is the beauty of design.



DESIGNER/PHOTOGRAPHER: MAJA DE SILVA / LOCATION: NONNA CAFE

ABOUT THE WRITER

Maja de Silva is a Copenhagen-based interior architect and photographer with an international background spanning Switzerland, the US, and Poland. She blends design expertise and visual storytelling to create intimate, thoughtful interiors while embracing a modern Scandinavian lifestyle.



DANISH LANGUAGE GOALS FOR 2026

Brooke Taylor Fossey's roadmap to sustainable Danish learning in 2026.



CANVA

DO YOU HAVE a New Year's resolution to learn Danish?

Then I have a word for you: *nytårsforsæt*.

It's not *fortsæt* – a word you might already know, meaning *continue*. That would turn your New Year's resolution into a *New Year's continuation*...not quite what we're aiming for.

Forsæt – without the second t – means *intention*, and intentions are about deliberately committing to an action or goal.

If that describes you when it comes to Danish, here's how I would set attainable Danish language *nytårsforsætter* in 2026.

1. CREATE HABITS

One of the key factors in long-term success is building realistic, repeatable habits. Create cues for yourself so that you choose Danish automatically. This could look like:

- Setting your homepage to a Danish news site
- Always starting tv time with a Danish show
- Making Danish music or podcasts your go-to during your commute
- Scheduling *snakkeklub* into your calendar every week for all of 2026 – and planning around it, not the other way around

Habits form when tasks no longer feel like extra work and become part of your lifestyle.

2. FIND THE RIGHT MOTIVATION

You need a reason to choose Danish – and to genuinely look forward to it. If learning Danish feels like something you *have* to do, it will never become something you turn to for comfort, curiosity, or joy.

For me, the motivations that last are:

Self-improvement: I see learning Danish as an investment in myself and a way I continue to grow as a person

Connection: language is a means to the ends I care about: deeper relationships with people I care about.

Empowerment: through understanding and clarity, I navigate my day-to-day with greater confidence.

Take time to identify what truly motivates you, and shift your mindset from “I have to study” to “this is my path to ___.”

3. FIND SUPPORT

It's easy to turn inwards with language learning until you *feel ready* to ‘go public,’ but finding your community will give you the support you need to blossom.

- Tell people that Danish is your goal.
- Join speaking groups.
- Find the people who have your back and set up Danish-only recurring plans with them.

Ultimately, speaking will involve other people, so find your people!

4. MAKE IT ENJOYABLE (SO IT DOESN'T BURN YOU OUT)

When we enjoy something, habits form naturally.

Language learning isn't one-size-fits-all, so your approach shouldn't be either. Pay attention to what energises you and spend your time there.

Do you work better learning alone or with oth-

ers? Find the right mix of apps versus in-person that suits you!

Love reality TV? Binge Danish shows -- *with* Danish subtitles.

Wild about board games? Join a local Danish game night meet-up.

Obsessed with pop music? Let Danish pop music become your newest fixation. Don't just listen passively: look up the lyrics, search up words you don't know yet, and learn to sing along.

The more Danish feels like pleasure rather than pressure, the more sustainable your learning becomes.

5. CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSES

You *will* make progress! And you'll probably hit plateaus, too. That is all part of the long game.

Take note of where you are today. Record a video in which you speak Danish, or write an email without using Google Translate or ChatGPT. Look back in 3 months, 6 months, and a year. Note your progress and celebrate! This is motivation for continuation.

6. SET REALISTIC GOALS – AND STAY FLEXIBLE

Goals shouldn't be rigid. Break your big language goal into smaller, manageable steps.

Want to understand spoken Danish better? Start with beginner podcasts like *Dansk i Ørerne* and gradually work up to native-speed podcasts.

Want to improve your spoken Danish? Speak out loud – even to yourself – for at least five minutes a day.

You can set very specific goals or keep it general, depending on you. Build lifestyle changes. Adjust as you go. And remember, we're not robots.

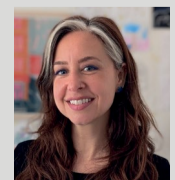
Show up in small ways, even on your worst days.

And if you fall off the Danish language tog (train), hop back on. Better yesterday than today -- BUT better today than tomorrow!

Godt nytår, and happy habit-forming in 2026!

ABOUT THE WRITER

Brooke Taylor Fossey is a Danish language coach and content creator based in Copenhagen. With a background spanning city planning, craft beer, and bagel-making, she now helps learners explore Danish language and culture on [@nearlydanishdame](https://www.instagram.com/nearlydanishdame)



THE QUIET TRUTH ABOUT SELF-EMPLOYMENT

This issue, **Diana-Medrea Mogensen** explores how self-employed professionals can use January to assess what their business truly requires - and what it quietly costs.



CANVA

JANUARY IS NOT a blank page but a return.

People return to work, either slowly or abruptly. Sales have already happened. The year has ended, but it has not yet closed. You update numbers, reconcile accounts, and begin implementing the decisions you made months ago through meetings, obligations, and rhythms that now shape your days.

JANUARY IS WHERE CONSEQUENCES ARRIVE

Some people return to silence and low activity. Others step straight into calendars that were filled long before the year began. In both cases, January brings a particular honesty. It reveals the business's structure as it currently exists, not as it appeared when plans were still theoretical.

This is why January feels heavy for many self-employed people. The weight rarely comes from missing motivation. It comes from reality settling in.

After December's push, the invoices, the family commitments, the travel, and the mental fatigue, January asks a practical question: what are you carrying into the new year?

For the self-employed, January is rarely about launching. It is about closing. You close the accounting year, close open loops, and sometimes close chapters that no longer serve the way you work or live.

THIS IS WHERE BALANCE-MAKING BEGINS

Balance-making starts with finances, because it has to. You update the books, review the numbers, and draw a clear line between one year and the next. Without that clarity, everything that follows rests on assumptions.

At the same time, numbers alone do not tell the full story. A business can look stable on paper while costing too much in energy, time, or peace of mind. January gives you the distance to look at both sides without urgency.

A useful place to begin is with success, defined on your own terms. Look at what actually worked last year. Identify the projects that brought stability, learning, or momentum. Notice which clients were worth the effort and which decisions made daily work easier rather than harder.

“JANUARY IS NOT A BLANK PAGE BUT A RETURN. IT IS WHERE PLANS STOP BEING THEORETICAL AND REALITY QUIETLY SETTLES IN.”

This step matters more than it seems. January works better when it begins with recognition of what was done.

From there, the harder questions become unavoidable. What demanded more than it gave back? What drained energy without delivering proportional value? What continued mainly out of habit, fear, or the belief that it was simply how things had to be done?

THIS IS WHERE STRATEGY STARTS TO FORM

Looking ahead does not begin with adding more, but it begins with deciding what to carry forward and what to leave behind. One simple way to structure this decision-making is to think in three directions.

First, consider what you want to do more of in the new year. Focus on activities, offers, or ways of working that felt sustainable and aligned.

Second, decide what you want to do less of. Identify commitments that no longer make sense when viewed from January rather than from the urgency of last year.

Third, choose what you want to introduce that did not exist before. Aim for one or two intentional changes based on experience, not ambition.

When numbers are unclear or incomplete, intuition can serve as a useful secondary indicator. Pay attention to what you feel curious or even relieved to return to. Notice which tasks you avoid without a clear reason. Observe what you quietly hope will not reappear this year.

THIS IS NOT ONLY EMOTION, BUT INFORMATION

The body often reacts faster than the spreadsheet. January makes this visible because the noise has dropped and patterns become easier to spot.

At the same time, intuition does not replace numbers. This is still a business. Taxes require preparation, finances require review, and planning requires grounding. January offers the right conditions to do this work calmly, without the pressure of selling or performing.

Once the numbers are clear and the reflection is complete, scheduling becomes possible. The goal is to achieve a realistic structure: confirmed projects, likely priorities, and protected time.

The quiet truth about self-employment is that January shows you what your business is built on, what it costs you, and what it gives back. It highlights which decisions from last year still make sense and which need revision.

January is not asking for reinvention. It is asking for honesty. Have a prosperous 2026!

ABOUT THE WRITER

Diana Medrea-Mogensen is a Romanian-born entrepreneur, funding strategist, and educator based in Denmark. She founded We Are Entrepreneurs to empower expats and underrepresented groups in building sustainable businesses.



THE CITIZENSHIP LABYRINTH

Ali Lewis talks to Miriam Thompson about Danish citizenship, democracy, and turning lived experience into guidance for others.

MIRIAM THOMPSON'S BUSINESS logo is a labyrinth with a passport at its centre. It's hard to think of something more suitable for her profession. Who is entitled to citizenship? What does the process involve? How long does it take? What if you're rejected? It's a notoriously complex process, as the briefest of glances at any Facebook group for internationals shows. "Yes, it is a labyrinth," Miriam acknowledges. "But you can get there." And luckily, she's here as our guide.

Miriam's citizenship consultancy is new, but it is underpinned by her many years of experience supporting internationals in finding their way in Denmark. It all began back in 2002, when she moved to Odense with her Danish husband after twelve years together in the US. Miriam, who had a long and successful career as a physical therapist in the US before moving, remembers keenly the culture shock they experienced. Even though her husband is Danish, they had been away from the country for over a decade and much had changed.

"There was no system to integrate me as a spouse at that time," Miriam says. The authorities assumed that because her husband was Danish, they didn't need the same support as other internationals. It took Miriam four years to find paid work after navigating a "frustrating" system, and even then, she was paid far less than she had been in the US.

Back then, seeking Danish citizenship was "never really in the forefront of my mind", Miriam says, much less becoming a professional citizenship advisor. "I wasn't aware of wanting or needing it," she explains. "Permanent status, yes, because that has such an impact on job stability and many other factors about life here."

"I don't see representative democracy working when an increasing number of people who are living here on a permanent basis don't have access to that representation. That is why citizenship matters so much."

In 2017, Miriam found herself unemployed and decided a change of career direction was needed. She started volunteering for an NGO, [Den Frie Rådgivning \(DFR\)](#) in Odense first, teaching women how to bike, and later as a volunteer adviser.

"I was introduced to how community organisations function and that really interested me," Miriam says. She was also reminded of her own struggles with integration, seeing the situations the people seeking advice at DFR faced.

"If you don't know the system and nobody is



MIRIAM THOMPSON

reaching out to you, you don't know where to go to get the information, and you'll end up getting the short end of the stick," she says.

At the same time, Miriam was realising the importance of national politics in Denmark, and how many internationals were disenfranchised from this because they weren't citizens. "Voting and democracy is something I feel strongly about," she says. "I don't see democracy working when an increasing number of people who are living here on a perma-

ment basis don't have access to that representation. That is one reason why citizenship matters so much."

Miriam applied for Danish citizenship in June 2017, but it would not be until September 2020 that she finally held her Danish passport in her hand. When asked what she would most like to see changed about the process, Miriam says unequivocally, "The case processing time!" One of the most commonly asked questions applicants pose, she says, is not only if, but when, they can become



MIRIAM THOMPSON

citizens. Currently, it can take an average of over 24 months to process, and many experience upwards of 30 months. “And that doesn’t even cover the time between the decision and finally being able to obtain a passport,” Miriam adds.

“People who I advised would say, ‘Can we pay you?’ I started to think there could be a possibility here.”

Miriam’s own experiences inspired her to volunteer as an advisor to others seeking citizenship, first at the community organisation [Fair Statsborgerskab](#), then a range of Facebook groups. “That’s a luxury that I could do that. Let’s not be privilege-blind,” she says. “It’s thanks to my husband’s employment that I could devote myself 100% to helping others on a voluntary basis.” Over the past 8 years, Miriam has advised hundreds of internationals in diverse situations.

Last year, a change in family circumstances meant Miriam could no longer devote herself to volunteering. She decided the time was right to look into whether there could be a market for a consultancy on citizenship cases. “I knew others were doing what I had been doing and getting paid for it,” she says. “Also, people who came and saw me personally for help with their applications would say, ‘Can we pay you?’ I started to think there could be a possibility here.”

That led to the establishment of [Miriam T. Consulting ApS](#), which Miriam founded in October 2025. “I did think of more creative names, but my name is already well established as a brand in the area of citizenship, so I figured, why not use it?” she laughs.

Now, Miriam divides her time between giving free

advice on general questions online and consulting on a paid basis with applications for Danish citizenship and permanent residence. She helps people understand “the rules and procedures along with the individual applicant’s situation and when it might be an appropriate time to apply.” It is often the latter question that she finds especially difficult to answer, as it depends on the individual’s circumstances but also potential changes in the requirements and procedures, which can and often do change during the process.

“It’s very clear to me that people don’t know what situation they’re in. Whether you think you have an easy or a hard case, everything requires an initial consultation.”

Miriam says she never knows how a case might turn out when she is initially contacted, so her services have to be bespoke. “One thing I have learned is that most don’t understand their situation and their chances of obtaining citizenship,” she says. “Whether you think you have an easy or a hard case, everything requires an initial consultation, as invariably something comes up that can be a potential hindrance or factor in fulfilling the requirements or completing the process in as short a time as possible.”

She helps people gather the necessary information and documents. “This isn’t as clear as it could be on the official webpages. That’s definitely another thing I’d like to see improve,” she says. “People don’t know what they could or should attach to their application, which could make their case stronger.”

Miriam does not represent people before the authorities, but can guide them through the appli-

cation process. She also advises on rejection cases. “One of the hardest things in the whole process is that rejection letters generally only name one thing that is wrong or missing on the application,” she points out. “Then there will be a sentence saying the ministry hasn’t assessed whether the applicant fulfils the rest of the requirements. So you don’t know what else might be missing.”

General questions and initial enquiries can be asked through Miriam’s Facebook group, [Ask Miriam - Danish Citizenship and Permanent Residence](#), which attracted over 2000 members in its first month. She monitors all posts and provides initial free advice, assisted by several former colleagues. “I was in five different groups, and it was impossible to keep up with, so I decided to just start my own!” she says. Still, life is busy. “My husband reminds me to sleep and eat!” she laughs. “But I really love what I do. I just want to help and guide people, in the way I wish someone had done for me when I needed it.”

To contact Miriam and to find out more about her services: [Miriam T. Consulting ApS \(miriamt.dk\)](#)

ABOUT THE WRITER

Ali Lewis is the reporting lead for Last Week in Denmark, a freelance writer, and content creator with a focus on music, feminism, and LGBTQI+ history. Originally from Scotland, she moved to Billund in 2024 with her family after a career in education.



SHOULD THE UK FOLLOW DENMARK ON MIGRATION?

Maja Christiansen Cawthra guides us through Europe's toughest migration policies - and asks what the UK risks inheriting by following Denmark's lead.

DENMARK'S MIGRATION LAWS are considered to be [one of the strictest](#) in the world, being dubbed "a pioneer in restrictive migration policies," as Marie Sandberg of AMIS describes. Over the past decade, its parliament has passed [more than 100 laws](#) aimed at limiting arrivals. Additionally, Denmark has openly pushed for a near-zero asylum system and joined other European leaders in calling for [reinterpretations of the European Convention on Human Rights](#) to make it easier to expel foreign nationals with criminal records.

This position has gained even more political momentum beyond Denmark. [In a recent joint statement](#), Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and UK Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer argue that protecting borders is essential to defending democratic trust: "controlling who comes here is an essential task of government and is what the public rightly demands." Their stance suggests that Danish policies are increasingly shaping mainstream European debate. These developments raise interesting questions about the direction of British migration policies and how people with experience of these systems might feel such shifts.

To explore this, I was lucky enough to sit down with Danish-born Henriette to gain insights from her many years living in the UK.

A STORY ABOUT PRIVILEGE AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

Henriette moved to London in 2008, living there for 14 years before returning to Denmark in 2022, with both Brexit and the Covid19 outbreak weighing on her decision. Yet even now, she describes herself as straddling two identities.

"I have two homes." "I felt like I was moving home to my family...but I'd also moved away from my home and network in London...I've changed a lot. And I think when you live in a city like London, it's difficult not to change."

London is often described as one of the most multicultural cities in the world — a place where people from all over converge. But even a city like this is not free from double standards. For Henriette, she was welcomed.

"People were curious more than anything," she says. "They wanted to know about Denmark, about my background." Her background even helped her in job interviews: "I had several people say to me, 'Oh, you're Danish! They're good workers.'"

But that curiosity was not evenly distributed: "I had people complain to me about Polish workers 'taking jobs,' but then they'd say, 'Oh, but you're Danish, that's different.'" Henriette recognises that her whiteness, fluent English, and minimal accent shielded her from such scrutiny.

"No one ever called me a migrant," she tells me. "People assumed I was British. Or they said I was basically British because I'd been there so long."

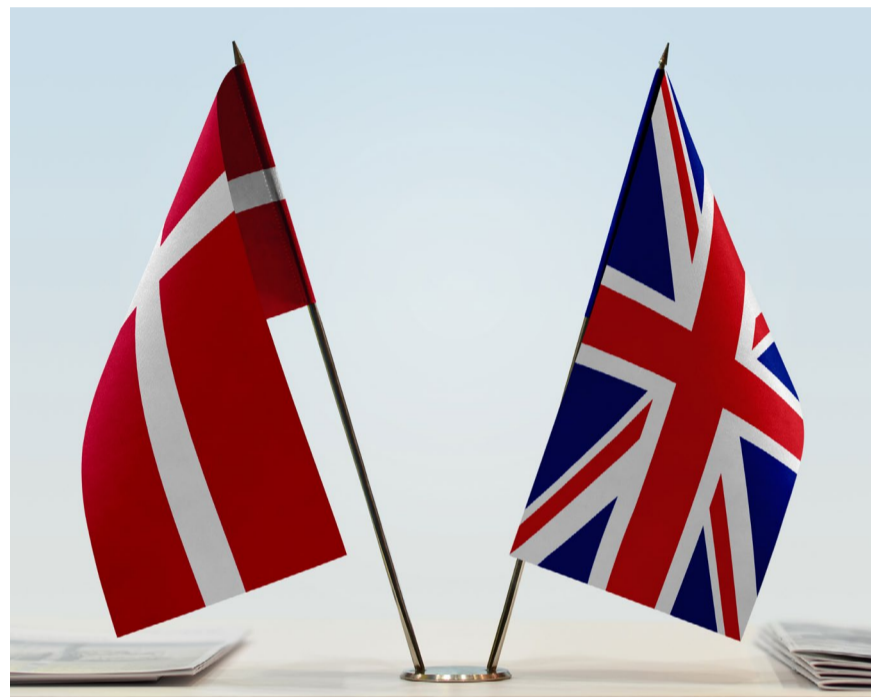
When I ask her why she thought that was, she explains the role language plays. In Denmark, the emphasis on English education and a cultural familiarity with Anglo-American media make it easier for Danes to integrate into English-speaking countries. For someone else, adapting to Danish society may require some 'cultural translation'.

"You might need someone to explain what Danish society is," she says. "What the norms are. It's not as culturally adjacent."

This is where she sees a gap in empathy: an expectation that integration is a one-way process: "It's interesting how people are so afraid of cultures that are different," she says. "Yet they spend money travelling, on eating out and trying restaurants and foods... People want the culture, but not always the people."

Henriette found that Danish culture in particular was admired.

"It was maybe in 2016 that the concept of hygge became a thing, and books



CANVA



SHABANA MAHMOOD, CURRENT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE UK, FOLLOWING HER DISPATCHING OFFICIALS TO DENMARK TO STUDY THEIR BORDER CONTROL AND ASYLUM POLICIES. PHOTOGRAPH: THOMAS KRYCH/ZUMA PRESS WIRE/SHUTTERSTOCK



CURRENT MAYOR OF COPENHAGEN, SISSE MARIE WELING, FROM THE POLITICAL PARTY SE
PHOTOGRAPH: IDA MARIE ODGAARD/RITZAU SCANPIX

were written about it... All the Danish crime shows, *Forbrydelsen*, *Broen*, they were all shown on the BBC, and everyone was really into the Scandic noir. I think that's where the idea of Danish culture as enviable or cool came from."

BREXIT AND THE UK'S STRATEGIC TURN

But even the perceived status and being an 'exception' did not mean Henriette was unaffected by the shift in the atmosphere around immigration following Brexit.

"I felt it, even though no one was saying, 'Get the Danes out.' It was still like — if you don't want me here, why am I paying taxes to fix the roads of a country that doesn't want me?"

This feeling of being tolerated rather than welcomed shaped her decision to leave.

"It must be amplified for people who didn't choose the country they ended up in," she adds. "If you're in a detention centre...waiting for a decision from people who are angry that you're there...it must be so isolating." She stresses how privileged her decision was: "I'm not a forced migrant. I chose to move. That's a huge difference."

When discussing the UK's new admiration for Danish-style immigration policies, Henriette says, "Strategically, it's smart. But that doesn't make it morally right."

She argues that Sir Keir Starmer's approach mirrors the Danish Social Democrats' shift toward stricter policies in order to [win over centrist and conservative voters](#). She notes how the recent Danish elections showcase a growing [divide](#) similar to the UK's post-Brexit landscape: multicultural cities leaning left, rural areas voting for parties promising stricter controls.

"In big cities like Copenhagen, people live with multiculturalism. They benefit from it," she tells me. "But often the people making the strictest decisions are the ones with the least exposure to diversity." "It's not just migrants voting. It's everyone who lives around them."

CONSEQUENCES FOR DENMARK AND THE UK

While Denmark's strict migration strategy has been effective, with asylum applications in Denmark at their [lowest level in over forty years](#) (since May 2025), this hard line has not been without domestic unrest and consequences. This can be seen in ongoing debates targeting "[parallel societies](#)", allowing states to demolish or sell housing in areas where at least half the residents have a "non-Western"

background. This hostile environment could have dimmed any sort of attraction that Denmark has, similarly to how Brexit lessened the appeal in the UK.

"It feels different now," she says. "I don't think people look at the UK the same way. The appeal isn't what it used to be - I feel like it's put a dark mark on them."

This begs the question: Should the UK be copying Denmark?

Michelle Pace, immigration scholar and professor in Global Studies, says the UK "[should think twice](#)" before doing so. In her book *Un-welcome in Denmark*, she highlights how a major shift occurred when changes to the Aliens Act allowed authorities to revoke refugee status if conditions in someone's home country were

deemed to have improved. In 2019, parliament introduced what has been widely called a "paradigm shift" in asylum policy, leading to reassessments of Syrians with temporary protection. Many Syrians have had their residency revoked, but could not be deported, instead being placed in restrictive departure centres. Pace describes how this is a "non-life — seemingly designed to push them to leave voluntarily." Not only does this illustrate the brewing social unrest within Denmark, but the country has also faced [criticism and backlash](#) outside of Denmark.

As the UK increasingly looks to Denmark as a model, it risks importing not only policies but their consequences. Denmark's system has succeeded in driving asylum applications to historic lows, yet at the cost of fostering a climate of fear and uncertainty for those living under it. As Pace writes, "Denmark's story is a reminder that migration policy is not just about managing numbers — it is also about the lives shaped by those policies."

“MIGRATION POLICY IS NOT JUST ABOUT MANAGING NUMBERS - IT IS ABOUT THE LIVES SHAPED BY THOSE POLICIES.”

ABOUT THE WRITER

Maja Christiansen Cawthra is an intern at Last Week in Denmark. She recently completed her Bachelor's degree in Language and International Studies, with plans to pursue a career in journalism and communications. She is passionate about cultural differences, international relations and finding meaningful ways to connect people through words and ideas.



WHEN YOUR RIGHT TO STAY HERE IS AT RISK

Julia Jones responds to an international facing job loss, residency uncertainty, and the fear of losing everything they've built in Denmark.



UNSPLASH

IN DEAR JULIA, psychologist Julia Jones answers readers' questions about life between cultures, exploring what it takes to build meaning and connection as an international in Denmark while staying true to yourself. Ask your own question anonymously [here](#) or [learn more](#) about Julia's therapy practice for internationals, called Jaywalk. The question below is quoted as written.

DEAR JULIA...

I came to DK 6 years ago for my Master's degree. After finishing my studies, I was fortunate to stay in DK with a full time job. I've dedicated a lot to that job and to fit in Danish society, this included completing danish classes, having volunteer jobs, learning about danish society and even passing the danish culture exam. Finally in August 2025, I was able to submit my application for a permanent residence after "ticking" all the boxes to the many requirements there are. As a non-EU person, this was some-

thing I was really looking forward to, it was a milestone for my life here because it would signify that I'm no longer dependent of having a job to have the right to stay and keep the life I've built here. Unfortunately, September 2025 came with bad news and I was informed that my job contract was being terminated due to some organizational changes in the company I worked. Suddenly, all the efforts I've taken to fit and build a life here have vanished. I now face the uncertainty of whether I can stay or will I be sent back to my home country. I have 4 months in total to find a new job so that I can keep my permanent residence application going, otherwise I need to apply for a job-seeking visa that will grant me 6 more months to get a job. If I don't succeed in this timeline, that's it, I need to go back.

How can we as internationals cope with this type of pressure, where time is running, job market is not doing well and, on top of that, you risk losing all you've worked for with no safety-net whatsoever?

It's frustrating, sad, overwhelming - you doubt of your capabilities, you doubt of your worth, you cannot find meaning to your actions and efforts because what's the point of it. You even blame your roots because that's the reason why you have to face this uncertainty. That's my story and my question.

Thanks for creating this space, it really resonates with me and I find big support through it.

Dan

DEAR DAN...

I'm so sorry that you are in this situation. It must be incredibly hard to have the promise of permanent residency taken away the moment you thought you had earned it. Many of us believe that if we do what we are supposed to do, work hard and follow the rules, life will reward us. But life can be unpredictable and, at times, deeply unfair, like in your case.

For years, you had a job and a clear goal: perma-



PEGGY_MARCO_PXARAY

ment residency. The rules were hard but predictable. Now both the job and the predictability are gone. The ensuing uncertainty triggers the body's threat response and upsets our emotional and mental balance.

From an evolutionary perspective, this makes a lot of sense. Our psyche's task is to keep us safe by predicting what comes next based on past experience. When reality suddenly contradicts what we expected, the alarm goes off. Danger ahead.

The body floods with stress hormones. Sleep, digestion, and concentration, among other functions, are all affected, along with our thoughts and feelings. Typically, the body can regulate the threat response flexibly to help us weather life's challenges. But when our livelihood and place in the world are at stake, stress can stay chronically elevated.

This is the reality many non-EU internationals face after a layoff. You ask how to cope in this situation, when time is running out, and you risk losing everything you've built. So let me share seven pieces of advice with you.

1. NAME IT TO TAME IT

You feel awful because the situation is awful. The doubt, anger, despair, and fear that are showing up do not mean there is something wrong with you. They are healthy reactions to an unfair event. Give yourself the grace of seeing these feelings as normal rather than signs of weakness.

2. FIND SAFETY IN YOUR BODY

When the body sounds the alarm, self-care is usually the first thing to go. Routines fall apart, meals get irregular, we numb ourselves with screens or alcohol, or hide in bed. Your task now is to counteract that reflex. Be your own caring parent: move, eat, sleep, and keep small rhythms that tell your body it is safe in the present moment.

3. LOG IN AND LOG OUT

Worrying is a coping mechanism that gives us the illusion of control, but it will not save you. Give yourself windows to lean into the worry, then shift your attention away from it and take a few practical steps toward finding a new job. It can help to work to a schedule. Sit at your desk for the hours you have decided on, even when motivation is low. And just as importantly, allow yourself to stop when the day's share is done.

4. REMEMBER WHAT YOU'VE ACHIEVED

You came to Denmark six years ago, completed a master's degree, learned the language, and built a career. Those accomplishments don't vanish because your job ended. The skills, discipline, and resilience you developed are still yours. Hold on to this truth.

“YOU START TO DOUBT YOUR WORTH AND EVEN BLAME YOUR ROOTS FOR THE UNCERTAINTY YOU’RE FORCED TO LIVE WITH.”

5. MEASURE SUCCESS BY VALUES, NOT OUTCOMES

Your goal of staying in Denmark is outside your control. What is inside your control is how you show up each day. Define what matters to you, and let your daily actions reflect it. When what you do aligns with your values, you are actively creating a rich and meaningful life. That is a success, regardless of the outcomes beyond your control.

6. TRUST THAT YOU WILL BE OKAY

This one takes time and inner work. But there is a part of you that already knows your worth is not tied to your visa, your job, or any external status. If you must leave Denmark, you will still be ok. Maybe even better. Your drive, your resilience, and your values live inside of you. They are not tied to a place.

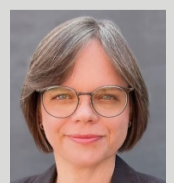
7. LOVE YOURSELF FIERCELY

The world can be unfair and unpredictable. Your main task is to be on your own side. Whatever the world throws at you, meet yourself with kindness. The future was never certain; it only ever felt that way. What can be certain is the way you support your wellbeing, no matter what happens.

And Dan, if you can, reach out for help. Talk with friends, family, or professionals who can hold space for your feelings and help you keep moving. You do not have to face this alone. I hope life will give you what you need and maybe even what you wish for.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Julia Jones is a psychologist supporting young people and adults navigating cross-cultural life. Through Jaywalk, she offers grounded, evidence-based therapy for internationals, informed by her own experience living across countries and cultures.



UNDERGROUND PSYCHEDELIC BOOM

Christian Green investigates the rise of psychedelic self-medication in Denmark, and the uneasy gap between clinical research, public demand, and political action.



CHRISTIANSBORG

THE UNDERGROUND USE of psychedelic drugs is thought to be quietly rising in Denmark and across Europe.

That is according to a [2025 European Drug Agency report](#), which notes that an unknown but increasing number of people are seeking out substances like LSD, MDMA, and psilocybin-containing mushrooms not just for recreation, but because of their perceived therapeutic and mental-health benefits.

Responding to the rise in underground use, The Alternative and Liberal Alliance created a proposal in the fall of 2025 to establish a governmental working group designed to investigate psychedelic drug use in Denmark.

But when members of parliament met on December 11 to discuss the proposed working group, representatives of nearly every other party, including Minister of the Interior and Health Sophia Lødhe of The Liberals, declined to support the measure.

Each member stated that they were happy to support research leading to eventual clinical approval

**“WE MUST RECOGNISE
THAT THOUSANDS OF DANES
ARE ALREADY SEEKING
OUT THESE DRUGS.”**

of psychedelic compounds as recognised medicines, but they were sceptical of any political approach.

“I support the intention that we should ensure new treatments for people with mental illnesses,” Sophia Lødhe said during the debate, “but... we are not promoting safe, innovative or effective treatment for patients in Denmark by setting up yet another working group.”

Karin Liltorp of The Alternative, who authored the proposal and argued on its behalf, said that the working group’s goal would not be to overrule clinical trials, but to shed light on the public health issues associated with those who are already self-

medicating with psychedelics, and who must do so secretly since they are illegal for non-research use.

“We must recognise that thousands of Danes are



KARIN_LILTORP-FOTOGRAF_MARIE_HALD

already seeking out these drugs every day, and currently they must do so secretly," Karin Liltorp told *Last Week in Denmark* prior to the December 11 debate.

Though it seems that this working group is unlikely to move forward, given the lack of support from other parties, these drugs will continue on the path towards clinical approval, and researchers say that the quiet world of psychedelic self-medication will continue to grow outside of official view.

WHY MORE PEOPLE ARE SELF-MEDICATING WITH PSYCHEDELICS

Kevin Mikkelsen has spent the past seven years tracking Denmark's underground psychedelic communities. The Copenhagen-based psychotherapist and founder of the Centre for Psychedelic Education (CEPDA) first began interviewing underground facilitators as part of his bachelor's thesis. What he's observed since then, he says, is a fundamental shift.

"Maybe 10 years ago or so, most people interested in using psychedelics weren't really seeking them out because of any perceived health benefits," Mikkelsen told *Last Week in Denmark*. Back then, people using magic mushrooms or LSD were mostly seeking spiritual exploration, expanded consciousness, or recreational experiences.

But over the years, as psychedelic clinical trials showing promising results treating PTSD, depression, and substance abuse disorders have made increasing media headlines, the kind of people seeking out these drugs has shifted.

"At our informational events today, we see bankers, doctors, teachers, students, everybody," Mikkelsen said. "There are all kinds of people who are suffering in some way and looking for new perspectives, but they can't access the information or resources they need."

A [2022 survey of 500 Danish psychedelic users](#) captured this dynamic as well. When asked for the primary reason they used psychedelic drugs, the most cited response was "therapeutic use," with "to experience something spiritual" close behind in second place.

The shift reflects a broader pattern described by the European Union Drug Agency: as clinical research generates positive headlines about psychedelic-assisted therapy for depression, PTSD, and addiction, more people are seeking these substances outside medical settings.

LESS ATTENTION MEANS LESS DATA

When a person decides to try psychedelics, many choose to do so with a facilitator who creates the setting for a trip and guides them through the experience.

Kevin Mikkelsen says he has seen a significant increase in new underground facilitators over the past five years, driven by rising demand from new users who want therapeutic support.

"The research has created this surge of interest, but there is a lack of public information or safe processes," Mikkelsen said. "That creates a big market for people who want to do underground therapy, but do not necessarily have any experience or accreditation. While many people are benefiting, some are also being hurt."

Today, he estimates there may be at least 100 actively practising underground facilitators in Denmark, though he says this count is an "unscientific guess" based on his work in these communities.

Given that the private use of psychedelic drugs is illegal, these facilitators operate in a legal grey zone, which makes things difficult for those researching them. Almost no one knows how many Danes are using psychedelics, or under what circumstances.

The European Union Drug Agency acknowledges on its website that psychedelics "are not well monitored by existing surveillance systems, meaning that it is difficult to comment with confidence on the prevalence of use and recent trends."

Danish national survey data offers only glimpses. Recent estimates suggest 7% of 16-44-year-olds have used hallucinogenic mushrooms at least once. A 2024 report found that 1.5% of respondents had used hallucinogenic mushrooms in the past year and 0.8% had used LSD—slight increases from 2021, when 1.1% had used mushrooms, and less than 0.3% had used LSD.

But these numbers may significantly undercount actual use.

Danish customs have reported a steep rise in the number of psilocybin-containing mushrooms and other psychedelics seized, and a paper published by Aarhus University's Centre for Drug Research notes that increasing numbers of young people in treatment for substance abuse report using psychedelic drugs.

Margit Anne Petersen, associate professor at Aarhus University and a co-author of that paper, told *Last Week in Denmark* that psychedelics still ultimately make up a small portion of the drugs consumed in Denmark when compared to can-



KEVIN MIKKELSEN AND KARIN LILTORP (CREDIT: KEVIN)

nabis or cocaine.

"Since they are less of an issue, they get less attention," Margit Anne Petersen said. "That also means we get less data on their usage."

"A BIG FIRST STEP" TOWARDS PUBLIC CONVERSATION

For those who want to self-medicate through psychedelic-assisted therapy sessions, there are no agreed-upon standards of care or practices for facilitators, leaving users at some risk.

In her research, Margit Anne Petersen has interviewed roughly 20 underground psychedelic facilitators. She's found that while many have long histories of psychedelic use and experience guiding others, they differ widely in their philosophies and methods.

Some embrace the new therapeutic approach, modelling their sessions on those conducted in clinical trials. Others believe the psychedelic field has become over-medicalised, preferring to draw on its roots in spiritual and indigenous roots.

Petersen believes that, even if The Alternative were able to eventually decriminalise psychedelic use and introduce standard practices to facilitators, many would refuse this model and continue to practice how they see fit.

For Kevin Mikkelsen, The Alternative's proposal served an important purpose, even if it won't make it any further in this year's parliament.

"It is a big first step to bring this to the floor and start a public conversation," Mikkelsen told *Last Week in Denmark*. "There is just so much we don't know right now. If we want to do anything, we first need this sort of concerted effort to build up our knowledge as a society so that we can make informed decisions going forward."

Given the likely clinical approval of a psychedelic medication in the near future and the growing public interest in self-treatment, the issue could resurface, especially as parties prepare for the national election later this year.

Until then, whether or not they are captured in official statistics, thousands of Danes will continue to seek out these substances independently.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Christian Green is an American journalist, photographer, and multimedia producer based in Copenhagen, Denmark. He previously served as a staff writer at the Carolina Public Press, covering science and health, and as a writer and producer for the podcast *Blind Landing*.



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL MOBILISATION?

In October, **Mark Søderberg** met with **Ida Auken** following her appointment as the government's spokesperson on democracy to discuss the new emphasis on "spiritual mobilisation."

IF THE CONCEPT of "spiritual mobilisation" sounds mysterious to you, don't worry, it sounds mysterious to many people in Denmark. The concept was introduced early in 2025 and has since been used several times in Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's speeches.

To grasp the concept, it's helpful to know the Danish phrase for spiritual mobilisation: "*åndelig oprustning*". The word "*åndelig*" can mean two things in Danish. It can mean something similar to the word "spiritual", referring to religious and supernatural aspects. Or something more secular, referring to all kinds of intellectual and artistic endeavours. "*Oprustning*", meaning "rearmament", the equipping of military forces with weaponry. Hence, "spiritual mobilisation" reflects military mobilisation, rearming people with spiritual and intellectual value.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

Mette Frederiksen said in her speech on Constitution Day at Rødning Højskole - the oldest Danish folk high school in Denmark - that democracy does not thrive in division and polarisation. Spiritual mobilisation would be a way to combat "conspiracy theories, fake news, and artificial intelligence", and would help to "ensure the future of democracy", she later added in a speech at Aalborg University.

With this in mind, LWID interviewed a democracy spokesperson, **Ida Auken**, to gain further insight into spiritual mobilisation.

Firstly, what is spiritual mobilisation?

"Spiritual mobilisation is about making us aware that we should not only mobilise militarily, but also be conscious of what we are actually fighting for. It's an understanding that there is a threat to our community and our democracy, both from the outside, in the form of Russian aggression against Europe, but also from within, in the form of radicalised forces, both from the right and from the left, and also from certain religious environments."

You say there's a "threat from within". But when you use this rhetoric of an "us and them", isn't there a risk of actually increasing polarisation?

"It's a clear risk that one should be aware of. For me, it's about building a stronger community. And that community consists of the very broad majority of the population, which should be protected against extreme views."

But aren't you also creating an "us and them" when you talk about a "threat from within"?



IDA AUKEN BILLEDE

"SPIRITUAL MOBILISATION IS ABOUT STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY"

"No. We clearly denounce extremism. And there clearly is an "us and them" when we talk about Russia."

The idea has been criticised for being an emotionally charged way of mobilising people, which goes against the Enlightenment ideals of critical thinking and institutional autonomy.

"It's a total misunderstanding that it's not important to have feelings for our community and for what we are fighting for."

Is spiritual mobilisation also about distancing us from the cultural power that the US has exerted?

"No. For me, there are two things that we shouldn't copy from the Americans. One is letting the country fall completely apart between rural and urban areas.

The other is that we must be Europeans. We must understand that our culture has deep foundations and a heritage that we should cultivate, instead of letting everything come from American culture."

Regarding freedom of religion, does spiritual mobilisation also mean granting greater space to other religions in the public sphere?

"As I see it, it's important that we in Denmark have freedom of religion, but not equality of religion. That's why we've called on the Church of Denmark - the religion that has shaped Denmark - to help demonstrate that Christianity can be a reconciling force, a force that binds people together, and not a force of conflict. Other religious minorities that hold the same attitude are, of course, welcome in the public debate."

So what role do you see for the Church of Denmark?

"I would actually like the Church itself to come up with some proposals. But we can see that the



ROEDDING-HOJSKOLE

mosques are quite good at inviting young people and students in to learn about Islam. Perhaps the Church could do the same. It could also be to participate in this debate. In fact, representatives of the Church can say different things than I can as a politician about the role of Christianity.”

Several priests have criticised this instrumentalisation of the Church. Some of them may not want to be part of a political agenda. How do you respond to that?

“No one is asking them to be. I think they should be uplifted when the Prime Minister is asking them to step forward and saying, ‘There is a need for what you are contributing.’ I really can’t see that as an instrumentalisation. On the contrary, it’s an invitation for them to fill that space with what they believe is right.”

The Social Democrats pride themselves on having a tough immigration policy. Is this debate about Danish values a way to position yourselves against the right wing before the coming elections?

“We believe that if you come to Denmark, you must become part of the community. It has nothing to do with some tactical move.”

In education, successive governments have cut funding to the humanities, citing market demands. Isn’t it hypocritical when you suddenly want to strengthen the role of the humanities?

“The whole exercise with the universities has been about getting more people to choose vocational education pathways. I don’t see it as an attack on the humanities. It’s about the need to ensure that, in a

period when there are fewer young people overall in the population, more of them choose education routes that society needs.”

Are there any concrete proposals you would like to put forward?

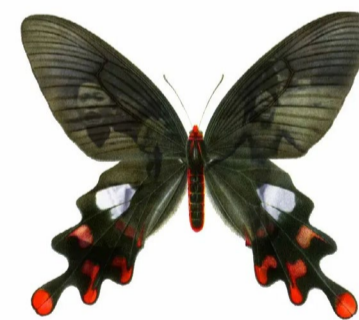
“One of the first things I’ll look at is how we can get more young people to engage in democracy. Among other things, by making sure that youth organisations that are members of the Danish Youth Council (DUF) have access to all education institutions, so young people can encounter them there. And I also think we need to get smarter about how we can strengthen democratic conversation in the media that young people are actually using.”

“Those are some of the first concrete things I’ll be working on. But it will also very much be a spokespersonship about helping the other spokespersons in their areas think about how we strengthen our common values and communities, and the understanding that we cannot take things for granted in these years.”

THE PARABLE OF THE BUTTERFLY AND THE GARDEN

As Auken has said elsewhere, the role of ‘spokesperson for democracy’ will very much be a role that creates debate. The prominent psychologist, Svend Brinkmann, used to be on board with the idea until proponents started focusing more on the religious aspects of the term. Some may remember when George W. Bush called the war on terror a “crusade”. That notion was repeated when Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Morten Dahlin, said that Danish soldiers “also fight for Christianity” That remark has since been heavily criticised.

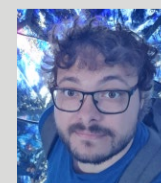
Brinkmann also worried that the idea of spirituality would get lost if it were only used as a means to an end, comparing the freedom of the spirit to a delicate butterfly. To that, Auken responds: if the garden in which the butterfly lived was threatened, then it would be necessary to protect that garden.



PAPILIO PHILOXENOS
Specimen: Quang Tri, Vietnam, October 1972
WORLD OF BUTTERFLIES

ABOUT THE WRITER

Mark Søderberg is a journalist and podcast producer with a philosophy background, exploring politics, art, and culture. He enjoys shaping compelling stories and relaxing through jazz piano and competitive blitz chess in his spare time.





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