

# DENMARK BRIEFING

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## “Ghetto laws”

On 18 December 2025, the [Grand Chamber of the European Court of Justice \(CJEU\)](#) determined that major elements of Denmark’s “Ghetto Package” are likely in [breach of EU racial equality legislation](#). The “Ghetto Package” is effectively a series of laws that target areas of high ethnic-minority residence forcing relocation and redevelopment. The final assessment of this latest ruling will be left to the Danish legal system. The court emphasised that discrimination based on ethnic origin is a serious form of racial discrimination that requires strong action. It also highlighted that stigmatisation is harmful, as it assigns negative traits to people based on their ethnic background. This can reinforce stereotypes and make it harder for them to be treated equally and feel part of society. The ruling followed a lawsuit filed in May 2020 by residents from Mjølnerparken, Copenhagen, against the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, arguing that the “ghetto package” amounted to unlawful racial discrimination. CJEU’s ruling represents a historic and principled victory for equality, the rule of law, and the residents [affected](#).

If Danish courts confirm that the law breaches EU racial equality legislation, the outcome remains uncertain due to the unprecedented nature of the case. However, experts anticipate several possible consequences, including compensation for affected residents, the right for current tenants to remain in their homes, potential reinstatement for those who were previously displaced, the removal of the term “non-Western” from Danish legislation, and broader implications that may limit other EU countries from adopting similar policies.

For years, citizens, civil society organisations, experts, and researchers have raised concerns about the “Ghetto Law,” warning against the discrimination and Islamophobia embedded in the legislation, as the law targets non-for-profit housing areas with more than 50% residents of “non-Western” origin, a category widely understood as a proxy for Muslim populations. Among the consequences of the law, is the requirement of reducing not-for-profit housing in

designated areas, through measures such as sales, demolitions, and forced evictions, resulting in the loss of thousands of family homes.

Critics argue that the policy is based on a politically constructed narrative that portrays residents in a negative and Islamophobic manner. This narrative is seen as relying on [selective or misleading data](#), reinforced by political rhetoric that contributes to the stigmatisation of affected communities.

For years, the categorisation of “non-Western immigrants and descendants” has played a central role in Danish political discourse, functioning not merely as a statistical descriptor but as a mechanism of racialisation. The implications extend beyond discourse. For example, a [parliamentary statement](#) from 2017 distinguishes between “Danes” and “foreigners,” further dividing populations into “non-Western” and “Western” categories. The latter classification primarily includes majority-white countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, while excluding countries that are geographically closer, illustrating that the distinction is not strictly geographic but reflects underlying cultural and racial assumptions. Despite holding Danish citizenship, individuals with “non-Western” background are thus politically seen as non-Danes and marked as “others”. They are further racialised as a homogeneous group, portrayed as living separately in so-called “ghettos” and forming “parallel societies,” which in turn has been framed as requiring increased surveillance, control, and targeted legislation. In a widely cited [speech](#), then Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen introduced the “ghetto laws,” in 2018 stating:

*The response from us politicians have often been to introduce new rules that apply to everyone. I have come to realize that a much more targeted approach is needed. One that does not inconvenience every single Dane across the entire country, but instead focuses on the areas where the problems are greatest, and only there. First, we must stop patching up decades of failed policies. We must set a new goal of completely eliminating the ghettos.*

Through an “us versus them” framing around the “ghetto laws,” political actors have portrayed broadly defined minority groups as sharing negative cultural traits, such as lack of integration, parallel societies, and social control, and as being in opposition to “Danish values.” This framing has helped justify exceptional legislative measures like the “Ghetto Package.” It also reflects a trend in which legal and political categories reinforce a divide between those considered fully Danish and those persistently treated as “others.” As the CJEU ruling is expected to favour the residents and likely lead to the removal of the “non-Western” category from Danish legislation, the government, a day before the ruling, signalled its intention to continue implementing discriminatory policies.

Thus, [a new political agreement](#) was introduced targeting non-Western residents indirectly, using so-called “objective” criteria (e.g., newcomers to the country who are on disability pension, awarded after 1 January 2003, under 60 years old, and live in certain selected housing areas). Rather than explicitly using the term “non-Western,” the government demonstrates how they are still able to target the same group without using the term, highlighting an intention to continue discriminatory policies.

This approach illustrates a broader pattern in which formal compliance with anti-discrimination requirements is paired with substantive measures that continue to disproportionately affect the same minority groups. By shifting from explicit ethnic categorisation to ostensibly neutral “objective” criteria, the government maintains the practical effects of the original policy while circumventing legal scrutiny.

This raises fundamental questions about the integrity of the rule of law: if legislation can be restructured to achieve the same discriminatory outcomes under a veneer of neutrality, the protection of citizens’ rights is effectively undermined.

## Eid prayers are prohibited on premises in Copenhagen

In 2025, the Copenhagen City Council proposed a [motion](#) to restrict the rental of municipal venues for gender-segregated events. The stated aim was to prevent public facilities in Copenhagen from hosting lectures where participants are separated by gender, on the grounds that such practices conflict with the principles of a liberal democracy and the notion of equal rights and dignity for all individuals.

The motion passed narrowly, with 24 votes in favour, 22 against, and seven abstentions. While framed as a neutral measure to uphold equality, the practical effects of the policy disproportionately affect Muslim communities. This includes longstanding practices, such as holding Eid prayers in municipal venues or parks, which are now prohibited, forcing these communities to rely on their own often insufficient facilities, such as mosques, or private rentals, which for many are unaffordable.

This policy illustrates how ostensibly neutral regulations can function as mechanisms of exclusion. By targeting a specific religious practice, gender segregation in Muslim contexts, the measure effectively limits access to public space along cultural and religious lines, even when the gender segregation is only a small part of the event, e.g. during salah (prayer services). Simultaneously, other gender-segregated activities, such as mothers’ groups or secular women-only programs, remain largely unregulated, suggesting that the policy’s enforcement is selective rather than universal.

This is not the first time [politicians](#) have criticised Muslims for practicing gender segregation and attempted to restrict these practices in public facilities in Copenhagen. The same was the case when [Danish universities](#), where criticised for an event hosted by a Muslim Student Association, where participants by their own choice sat in a lecture hall separated by gender. [Then Minister for Immigration and Integration, Kaare Dybvad Bek](#), argued that public institutions, including universities, have autonomy, but this autonomy has limits because they are state-funded<sup>1</sup>. He emphasised that allowing gender-segregated events effectively legitimises Islamist worldviews, which he views as incompatible with Danish values of equality and democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> [Universities](#) in Denmark are state-funded, independent institutions within the public sector, overseen by the Minister of Education and Research.

While he [frames](#) his comments as “raising a flag” rather than a direct threat, the underlying message was that if public leaders fail to address such issues themselves, political authorities could intervene. In other words, universities risk losing control over institutional decisions if their actions are perceived as contrary to state-defined democratic and moral norms.

This selective restriction of Muslim gender segregation signals a structural pattern of social and spatial marginalisation. As such, public sphere is implicitly defined in ways that privilege majority cultural norms, further stigmatising Muslim communities as outsiders, while portraying their religious and cultural practices as inherently incompatible with Danish values. The policy raises critical questions about the protection of religious freedom, highlighting how legal and policy interventions can both symbolically and materially reproduce social hierarchies and limit minority participation in public spaces.

## Restricting prayer rooms at Danish Universities

In 2025, following controversial recommendations from the government-appointed [Commission on the Forgotten Women’s Struggle](#), a body tasked with advising on how to supposedly “ensure that women from minority backgrounds enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other Danish women”, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen [announced](#) on Constitution Day her intention to ban the niqab and remove prayer rooms from educational institutions. Instead of introducing a formal state ban on prayer rooms at Danish universities, she indicated that Minister of Education, Mattias Tesfaye, and Minister of Education and Research, Christina Egelund, would communicate to universities that such facilities should not exist.

Just as gender segregated events have been problematised in political and public debate, Muslim use of prayer rooms have also been framed as promoting oppression and social control of women. This includes [Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen](#), who linked prayer rooms to social control and the oppression of women, despite criticism from [students](#) and [staff](#) who have highlighted the stigmatising impact and lack of consultation with Muslim communities. The political pressure led to permanent [closures](#) or [restrictions](#) at several institutions, ensuring so-called “neutrality” by removing all religious items. The association [Danske Universiteter](#) (Eng.: Universities Denmark) agreed that such rooms must remain neutral, prohibiting religious symbols or personal items, subject to monitoring and potential closure.

In response, [60 staff at the University of Southern Denmark](#) (SDU) wrote to management, describing prayer rooms as safe spaces whose closure has harmed the work environment. They stressed that the so-called “neutrality principle” should foster inclusion rather than erase cultural, spiritual, or personal expression, the very rationale for creating the reflection rooms in 2006.

The neutrality principle is problematic for several reasons; by framing neutrality as the absence of religion, it marginalises Muslim students and effectively signals who belongs within the university and who must be controlled. In effect, it transforms spaces meant for

reflection or personal practice into sites of surveillance and regulation, rather than inclusion. This approach disproportionately targets religious minorities, enforcing conformity to majority cultural norms while ignoring the diversity of students.

When the government chooses not to impose an explicit ban but instead pressures universities, it can effectively implement discriminatory practices that undermine both religious freedom and institutional autonomy, without taking direct legal responsibility. This indirect approach allows the government to influence institutional policies and practices while avoiding formal accountability for potential violations of constitutional rights. Over time, it normalises the regulation of minority faith practices in public institutions, marginalises students who rely on spaces such as prayer rooms, and establishes a precedent in which state pressure, rather than legislation, can shape the boundaries of acceptable belief and practice. The result is a subtle but pervasive form of social control, where freedoms are constrained through institutional compliance rather than overt legal prohibition, making it more difficult for affected communities to challenge discriminatory policies.

## General Elections 2026

On March 24, general elections were held, but a new government has not yet been formed. The result has [fragmented](#) the political landscape: 12 parties are now in Parliament, with only one major party and several mid-sized ones, making coalition-building more complex and likely to alter day-to-day politics in the Danish Parliament.

The SVM coalition (consisting of: The Social Democrats, The Liberal Party of Denmark and the Moderates) suffered significant losses. The Liberal Party of Denmark recorded its worst-ever result at 10.1%, while the Social Democrats had their poorest performance since 1903. In contrast, both the Danish People's Party and the Socialist People's Party made strong gains. The far-right Danish People's Party more than [tripled](#) its vote share and is now the [fifth-largest party](#), while the Socialist People's Party has become the [second-largest](#) in Parliament.

The election also reflected a broader fragmentation of the political landscape, with increased polarisation between parties advocating stricter immigration policies and Islamophobic policies and those emphasising welfare and climate agendas.

Experts had predicted that Muslims and Islam would be a central topic in the election campaign, and this proved to be the case. Throughout the election period, the party leader of the Danish People's Party and the Social Democrats even debated which of them had the [strictest immigration policies](#). The focus on Muslims and Islam in the election campaign reflects a broader normalisation of anti-immigration and anti-Muslim rhetoric across the political spectrum, where positions once associated with the far right are increasingly echoed by mainstream parties. Rather than remaining at the margins, such framing becomes embedded in centrist political discourse, shifting the baseline of what is considered acceptable policy and rhetoric.

Among other things, the Danish People's Party has promoted the "great replacement" theory, repeatedly claiming in interviews and campaign events that ethnic Danes could become a

minority within [70 years due to immigration](#). The party has also issued an [ultimatum](#) calling for a net outflow of Muslims, stating that it will not support a right-centre government that does not accept this demand.

The party also presented a 22-point plan for [remigration](#), which has been described as following the same line of thinking as [Generation Identitaire](#), a pan-European far-right youth movement founded in France in 2012 that established a Danish branch in 2017. During the election campaign, a [survey](#) showed that a majority of Danes agree that there should be a net outflow of Muslim immigrants, in comparison a 2019 [survey](#) showed that one in four Danes wanted Muslims out of the country, and in 2025 a [survey](#) showed that one in three Danes wants Islam to be banned.

The Social Democrats, who also seek to present themselves as hardliners, introduced [a new proposal on immigration: “We don’t want those who don’t want Denmark”](#). The proposal contains 18 initiatives. Among other things, the party wants to tighten the rules for obtaining citizenship, so that it is granted only to people who share so-called democratic values. It is important to note that [obtaining Danish citizenship is already difficult](#) – even for people who are born or raised in Denmark. For example, education does not count toward the employment requirement. This forces young people to choose between taking an education or working in an unskilled job to qualify for citizenship. On average, it takes 19 years to obtain Danish citizenship.

The Social Democratic proposal also includes establishing a new deportation agency and introducing a rule that would deny access to the healthcare system for people who commit violence against staff. Both the Danish Medical Association and the Danish Nurses’ Organisation have [criticized the proposal](#). They state that people cannot be denied medical treatment, regardless of what they have done or who they are.

Overall, the 2026 election illustrates how anti-Muslim discourse has become institutionalised across both right-wing and mainstream political actors, contributing to the normalisation of exclusionary policies and narratives in Denmark.

The election reflects both increased political fragmentation and a clear convergence on restrictive migration policies across the political spectrum. The alignment between the Danish People’s Party and the Social Democrats illustrates how positions once associated with the far right have become embedded in mainstream politics.

This development shifts the political centre toward exclusionary approaches, narrowing the space for rights-based alternatives and reinforcing a framework in which minority groups, particularly Muslims, are treated as objects of control rather than equal participants in society. In this sense, the normalisation of Islamophobic discourse reflects a broader reconfiguration of democratic inclusion, where belonging is increasingly conditional on conformity to dominant norms.