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## In the midst of a paradigm shift from integration to repatriation

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# **IN THE MIDST OF A PARADIGME SHIFT FROM INTEGRATION TO REPATRIATION**

INSIGHTS INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG REFUGEES  
AND LOCAL INTEGRATION POLICY WORKERS DURING 2018 TO 2020

**BY  
LOUISE DANGE**

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED 2022



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by

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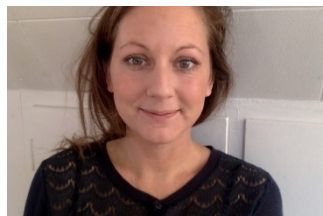
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## CV

Louise Dånge (birth name Louise Buhl Andersen) holds a BA in Anthropology and Sociology from Durham University and a cand.scient.anth from Copenhagen University. Her studies involved 5 months ethnographic fieldwork to Western Kenya, exploring the role and experiences of caregiving children. Emerging from this research, Louise founded an NGO, 'Care for Caregiving Children (DK: Fordi det Nytter) supporting Kenyan children and youth through education. Louise was the chairman of the board for this NGO from 2010 until 2019. Alongside her studies from 2008 to 2011, Louise worked as a research assistant at Centre for Business and Politics, at Copenhagen Business School, as well as at Steno Health Promotion Centre. From 2012 to 2014 she worked as a research officer the Institute of Social Psychology, at the London School of Economics and Political Science, on a multi-method research project exploring the role of schools in supporting HIV affected children and youth. After teaching English at a Danish primary school and having a year of maternity leave, Louise started as a PhD student at the Institute of Sociology and Social Work, at Aalborg University in January 2018. Through her involvement in the research projects mentioned above, Louise has worked with children and youth studies, health inequalities, home-based care, HIV/AIDS, pre-diabetes and lifestyle interventions, young refugees, policy implementation, and integration policies.

# ENGLISH SUMMARY

Through a qualitative longitudinal study (2018-2020) I explored: a) how young refugees aged 18-24, (n=12) experienced their resettlement in Danish municipalities, and b) how Local Integration Policy Workers (n=16) (LIPWs) experienced implementing national integration policies and their opportunities for supporting young refugees' resettlement. During this two-year period, I applied semi-structured qualitative interviews and photovoice exercises to seek insight into their respective experiences. The longitudinal study design enabled me to explore if and how their experiences changed over time, and how these changes correlated to broader circumstances occurring in Danish society at the time. During the study, Danish integration policies underwent major changes including a paradigm shift in 2019, which entailed increasing emphasis on repatriation. Meanwhile, the number of refugees granted residence permits markedly reduced. These changes greatly influenced the study participants' experiences and formed the focal point for this thesis. The thesis consists of three articles. **The first article** explores the young refugees' social navigation (Vigh, 2009, 2010), capacities to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) and agency (Barbalet, 1998) as they seek to reorient their lives, meanwhile the shifting political context affects the conditions for their lives. Unfolding four empirical cases, this article demonstrates their abilities to reorient their lives through difficult situations. However, the continuous confrontation with the possibility of repatriation, kept the young refugees in a prolonged state of fear and uncertainty, which affected their capacities to aspire and their engagement in future-oriented activities. **The second article** explores LIPWs' experiences of talking repatriation policies into being in their conversations with young refugees. From the empirical analysis, I found that discussing repatriation forced LIPWs' to handle strong emotional reactions, it challenged their abilities to motivate the young refugees' engagement, and it conflicted with their own professional ethical standing points. Drawing on Zacka's theoretical framework (2017), I subsequently discuss how articulating repatriation policies affects the LIPWs' moral agency, and ultimately challenges the core and ethical principles of social work. **In the third article** I focus on how municipalities adapted their implementation practices to the fluctuating numbers of arriving refugees and to the shifting political focus from integration to repatriation. In a context of the Street-level Bureaucracy literature, I explore how LIPWs experience that the changing implementation practices influenced their discretion and opportunities for incorporating social support for young refugees. Drawing on Maynard-Moody' and Musheno' (2002) concepts *state agent* and *civil agent* I found that while most LIPWs positioned themselves as *civil agents*, who ought to respond to the young refugees' psychosocial needs, their opportunities for realizing this varied across the two municipalities and changed over time. Engaging with Brodtkin's (1997, 2012, 2015) work, I conclude that the organization, structure, and management of the context in which LIPWs work, affect their discretion and opportunities to act as *civil agents*.



Based on the empirical findings discussed in these three articles, this PhD thesis contributes with insights into the realities of LIPWs and young refugees during policy shifts, and how their respective experiences relate to one another. The temporary conditions, arising from the political turn towards repatriation, manifested in the study participants' experiences and shaped the context of opportunities, in which newly arrived young refugees unfolded their lives. It consequently manifested in the following ways, a) it hampered the young refugees' future aspirations, as well as their abilities to plan for and act upon their envisioned futures, b) it challenged the LIPWs' professional roles and ethical principles, and c) it undermined the contextual structures, which enabled LIPWs to incorporate social support for the young refugees. The thesis heightens attention to the dangers of immigration policies that emphasise and embrace temporariness. If young refugees are to remain on temporary residence permits, with a looming danger of repatriation, they are retained in prolonged uncertainty, which impact on their well-being and functioning in society, which potentially have long-term consequences. If young refugees' residence permits remain temporary, this thesis calls for efforts to mediate the consequences arising from such prolonged uncertainty. Ensuring young refugees' access to social support and engagement meaningful activities, could strengthen their incorporation in society while they are here, and support their transitions into adulthood.

# DANSK RESUME

Gennem et kvalitativt forløbsstudie (2018-2020) undersøgte jeg: a) hvordan unge flygtninge i alderen 18-24 år (n=12) oplevede deres genbosættelse i danske kommuner, og b) hvordan kommunale integrationsmedarbejdere (n=16) oplevede implementeringen af nationale integrationspolitikker, og deres muligheder for at støtte unge flygtninges genbosættelse. I løbet af den toårige periode anvendte jeg semi-strukturerede kvalitative interviews og photovoice for at få indsigt i deres respektive oplevelser. Eftersom forskningsdesignet tog udgangspunkt i et forløbsstudie, var det muligt at undersøge, om og hvordan informanternes erfaringer ændrede sig over tid. Jeg fik også mulighed for, at undersøge, hvordan ændringerne hang sammen med større begivenheder i det danske samfund. I løbet af undersøgelsen gennemgik dansk integrationspolitik store forandringer, herunder et paradigmeskifte i 2019, som indebar et øget fokus på repatriering. Samtidig dalede antallet af flygtninge, som fik opholdstilladelse, markant. Disse forandringer havde stor indflydelse på informanternes oplevelser og derfor er omdrejningspunktet for denne afhandling. Afhandlingen består af tre artikler. I **den første artikel** undersøger jeg de unge flygtninges sociale navigation (Vigh, 2009, 2010), samt til at visualisere egen fremtid (Appadurai, 2004) og handlemuligheder (Barbalet, 1998), imens den skiftende politiske kontekst forandrer deres livsvilkår. Gennem fire empiriske eksempler viser jeg i denne artikel de unge flygtninges evner til at re-orientere deres liv gennem vanskelige situationer. Men artiklen viser også, at den konstante konfrontation med muligheden for hjemsendelse, fastholdt de unge flygtninge i en tilstand af frygt og usikkerhed, som påvirkede deres syn på fremtiden og engagement i deres daglige aktiviteter. I **den anden artikel** undersøger jeg kommunale integrationsmedarbejders erfaringer med at italesætte repatrieringspolitikker i deres møde med unge flygtninge. På baggrund af den empiriske analyse var det tydeligt, at italesættelsen af repatriering påvirkede deres møder med unge flygtninge på tre måder: det tvang kommunale integrationsmedarbejdere til at håndtere usædvanlig stærke følelsesmæssige reaktioner, det påvirkede deres muligheder for at motivere de unge flygtninges engagement, og det udfordrede deres professionelle etiske standpunkter. Med udgangspunkt i Zackas teoretiske ramme (2017) diskuterer jeg efterfølgende, hvordan samtalen omkring repatriering påvirkede kommunale integrationsmedarbejders moralske handlekraft, og i sidste ende udfordrer det sociale arbejdes etiske principper. I **den tredje artikel** fokuserer jeg på, hvordan kommunerne tilpassede deres implementeringspraksis til det svingende antal ankomende flygtninge og til det skiftende politiske fokus fra integration til repatriering. Indenfor rammerne af Street-level Bureaucracy-litteraturen undersøger jeg, hvordan kommunale integrationsmedarbejdere oplever, at den ændrede implementeringspraksis påvirkede deres faglige skøn og muligheder for at inkorporere social støtte til unge flygtninge. Med udgangspunkt i Maynard-Moodys og Mushenos (2002) begreber *state agent* og *civil agent*, peger analysen på, at selvom

de fleste kommunale integrationsmedarbejdere positionerede sig som *civil agents*, som burde reagere på de unge flygtnings psykosociale behov, så varierede deres muligheder for at realisere dette på tværs af to kommuner og ændrede sig over tid. Med inddragelse af Brodtkin (1997, 2012, 2015) konkluderer jeg, at organisationen, strukturen og ledelsen i den kontekst, som kommunale integrationsmedarbejdere agerer i, påvirker deres faglige skøn og handlemuligheder som *civil agents*.

Denne ph.d.-afhandling bidrager med dybdegående indsigt i kommunale integrationsmedarbejders og unge flygtnings oplevelser, og hvordan deres respektive erfaringer og oplevelser relaterer sig til hinanden. På tværs af de tre artikler belyses forskellige måder hvorpå de midlertidige forhold, der opstår som følge af det politiske fokus på repatriering, manifesterer sig i informanternes oplevelser, og former nyankomne unge flygtnings muligheder og livsvilkår. De midlertidige forhold manifesterede sig på følgende måder: a) det hæmmede de unge flygtnings evne til at planlægge egen fremtid, såvel som deres engagement og handlemuligheder, b) det udfordrede de kommunale integrationsmedarbejders professionelle roller og etiske principper og c) det underminerede de kontekstuelle strukturer, som understøttede de kommunale integrationsmedarbejders mulighed for at inkludere social støtte til de unge flygtninge. Afhandlingen øger opmærksomheden på farerne ved immigrationspolitikker, der understreger og omfavner midlertidighed. Hvis unge flygtninge skal forblive på midlertidige opholdstilladelser, med et konstant fokus på hjemsendelse, fastholdes de i længerevarende usikkerhed, som påvirker deres trivsel og funktion i samfundet, hvilket potentielt kan have langsigtede konsekvenser. Hvis unge flygtnings opholdstilladelser forbliver midlertidige, efterlyser denne afhandling en styrket indsats for at formidle konsekvenserne af en sådan langvarig fastholdelse i usikkerhed. Ved at sikre unge flygtnings adgang til social støtte og engagement i meningsfulde aktiviteter, såsom uddannelse, kan styrke deres deltagelse i samfundet, mens de er her og kan have afgørende betydning for deres vej til voksenlivet.

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# THIS THESIS IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

1. Dånge, L. Taking control and reorienting future aspirations: How young refugees in Denmark navigate life between integration and repatriation. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Accepted for publication, in press)
2. Dånge, L. 'It is as if we insert a conflict into the conversation, that wasn't there before, right?' Local Policy Integration Workers' experiences of talking repatriation policies into being in their encounters with young refugees. *Journal of Social Work* (Invited to 'revise and re-submit.' Resubmitted: under review)
3. Dånge, L. Facilitating social support for young refugees during radical policy change: Learning from the experiences of local integration policy workers in 2018-2020. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* (Submitted: under review)

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## PROLOGUE

*'I hope that one day I no longer have to receive the benefits. That I can take care of myself. I would like to get educated. I am tired of receiving this money. And often there are new rules and new rules. All these new rules about integration, it all means that foreigners are not welcome in Denmark'.* Hamid, 2019

As Hamid grew up with his siblings and parents in a small village near Kabul in Afghanistan, his school attendance was often disrupted by re-occurring violence caused by the Taliban. Several times a week Hamid was forced to skip school and work in a shop to provide basic needs for his family. During his childhood and early youth, Hamid's foremost focus was to get by, one day at the time. At the age of 15, Hamid was faced with the choice between joining the Taliban or become imprisoned by them. He decided to flee. At a late December evening in 2015, after a two-year flight alone across Europe, Hamid arrived unaccompanied in Copenhagen. He had no knowledge of the country in which he had arrived. During the following 2 ½ years, Hamid moved between several asylum centres, doing what he refers to as: *'Nothing, but wait'*.

In 2017, when he was finally granted temporary residence permit, he moved to a municipality in rural Jutland. He felt relieved, safe and he began dreaming of a better life, which he envisioned and expected to be in Denmark. Shortly after arrival in the municipality, his budding hope was overshadowed by experiences of confusion, stress, and isolation. Hamid was placed to live in a remote location an hour bus-drive away from the municipal town centre. He felt lonely and longed for friendships. His mailbox was quickly filled with bureaucratic letters he did not yet understand. The first time he met with his caseworker, he was obliged to fill in an integration contract to which he explains; *'She made me sign some papers that I have to not make any trouble or create problems. It was strange. I understand that perhaps something may have happened with others in the past. But I am not like that.'* As Hamid began following Danish lessons, he received news from Afghanistan that his father had died, leaving his mother and siblings in a fragile position. This affected him emotionally. Meanwhile, Hamid spent the first year in the municipality participating in several internships. None of these internships led to an ordinary job. He felt exploited by the companies as he worked for months without a salary, side by side with Danish youth who got paid for doing the same work tasks. Meanwhile Hamid searched for ordinary job opportunities by walking through town asking in every restaurant if they needed assistance. Although Hamid was illiterate, he strongly desired education, which he told his case worker. After completing level one at the language school, the municipality stopped financing his Danish lessons, and he felt pressured by them to find an unskilled job.

When Hamid finally got his first job at a pizzeria, he depicts his working experience as exploitation, as he was paid for less hours than he worked for. In the wake of the ongoing tightening of integration policies and their sharpening focus on repatriation, Hamid felt increasingly more stressed. Every time he was in contact with his caseworker, she asked him, if he wanted to return to Afghanistan. He was anxious for being deported. He feared that if he was to return to Afghanistan, he would be captured by the Taliban. Every time a new policy tightening was announced, his anxiety deepened. He considered liberating himself from the integration programme by living on the streets of Copenhagen without integration benefits, hoping to find employment and friendships in Copenhagen.

Eventually, Hamid managed to find another full-time job at a pizzeria, which paid him fairly. He thereby managed to pay and complete his Danish classes. On his own initiative, he also started studying at *Forberedende Grunduddannelse* (FGU). The last time I met Hamid in 2020 he proudly shared pictures from his masonry project and told me, that he wanted to become a bricklayer. With a smile on his face, he shared photos of friends he had made at FGU. Looking back at the three-year period in the municipality, he explained: *'Well. When you sit in an asylum centre and wait for your residence permit you think: "This must be the most difficult time." But once you receive your residence permit and arrive in the municipality you realise that, well, the most difficult time is actually starting right now.'* Hamid, 2020

Through this qualitative study, I sought to understand what it is like for young persons with refugee background, who recently obtained temporary residence permit, to create a new life in a Danish municipality. I was interested in understanding what these young people find important and meaningful in their lives, where they hope life will take them, and what they experience as influential for their abilities moving towards these future aspirations. Furthermore, I was interested in understanding how local integration policy workers experience their opportunities for supporting young refugees through these processes. It is my hope that this PhD thesis will contribute to a better understanding of this. Meanwhile the empirical data collection for this study, Danish integration policies underwent a significant paradigm shift, turning from focusing on refugees' integration to reinforcing their repatriation. The temporary conditions, arising from this radical policy turn, manifested in the experiences of all the study participants and therefore formed the focal point for this thesis. On that note, this thesis echoes how the young refugees, and those local integration policy workers involved in their lives, experienced the aftermath of these policy changes.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. YOUNG REFUGEES

This PhD directs attention to young refugees aged 18 to 24 for several reasons. From 2015 to 2018, 1.9 million people received international protection in the EU, of which more than 80 % were below the age of 34 (Eurostat, 2022; European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights, 2019). Extensive literature has documented how resettling and adapting to life in a new society is a demanding process requiring newcomers to acquire substantial new knowledge as they navigate through new social, legislative, linguistic, geographical, and cultural surroundings (Grünnenberg, 2006; Heinz, 2009; Pastoor 2015, Eide et al, 2018). Young refugees experience such processes while simultaneously undergoing important intellectual, physical, and social development while transitioning into adulthood (Pastoor, 2015; Pasic, 2018). Many young refugees have been exposed to traumatic events in their country of origin or during their flight (Giacco et al., 2018; Hebebrand et al., 2016), and various studies have found young people with refugee background particularly susceptible to poor mental health with high prevalence of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Bjorkenstam et al, 2020; Bronstein and Montgomery, 2011; Bronstein et al, 2013; Fazel et al., 2012; Noerredam et al, 2018). During the first phase of resettlement, young refugees therefore often undergo crucial recuperating processes dealing with traumatic experiences (Bean et al., 2007; Jakobsen et al, 2014; Sleipen et al 2017; Fazel, 2018). Those arriving unaccompanied, undergo these processes without the support of close family members (Bean et al., 2007; Derluyn et al., 2008; Hodes et al., 2008; Huemer et al., 2009). Resettlement therefore not only implies a change of place, but also involves young refugees' undergoing of crucial multiple transition processes, as they move from one life sphere to another, adapt to new societal surroundings, and recover from traumatic experiences.

While young refugees have been recognized as resourceful and their agency widely acknowledged (Eide and Hjern, 2013; Eide et al. 2018; Belloni, 2020; Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016; Chase et al, 2020), they continue to have lower educational outcomes, more restricted access to quality education, and are more likely to experience challenges entering the Danish labour market with its high educational demands compared to their ethnic Danish peers (Borsch et al, 2019a; Gauffin and Lyytinen, 2018; Montgomery et al, 2022). Montgomery and colleagues (2022) found that the risk of labour market marginalisation was higher among young refugees compared with their majority peers (Montgomery et al, 2022). Furthermore, limited language skills have been associated with social isolation and poor wellbeing (Montgomery 2008; Valenta 2008; Hebbani et al. 2018) as well as difficult access to employment (Jakobsen, 2021). Separation from family, friends, and familiar social networks, is known to cause feelings of social isolation, social exclusion, and weakened sense of belonging among young refugees (Montgomery 2008; Vervliet et

al. 2014; Correa-Velez et al, 2010). Finally, refugee children and youth are at a high risk of poor health and tend to encounter more obstacles accessing appropriate health care (Ellis, et al. 2011, Ziaian, et al. 2012, Barghadouch, et al. 2016, Mock-Muñoz de Luna, et al. 2018).

In this PhD research I focus on young refugees as I acknowledge of the sensitivity of their multiple transition processes during the first period of their resettlement. Their persistent susceptibility to disadvantaged social, health and educational outcomes, indicate that much is yet to be learned to adequately understand and support young refugees' resettlement and ensure their full incorporation in society. It is against this background, that I in this PhD research consulted young refugees about their own experiences of resettling in Danish municipalities. To explore what they themselves found meaningful and influential as they endeavoured to create a life in new surroundings. In the following section, I will outline how the political context in recent years has shaped the conditions for young refugees' legislative rights and fundamental being in Danish society, during first period of their resettlement.

## **1.2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SHIFT FROM INTEGRATION TOWARDS REPATRIATION**

Once young refugees are granted asylum and receive residence permits, they are assigned to specific municipalities, where they are legally obliged to live and engage in the integration programme. They are entitled to receive welfare integration benefits, on the conditions that they comply with these obligations. Since the Danish Integration Act was initiated in 1999, municipalities have been responsible for implementing the integration programme for refugees to foster their opportunities to become incorporated as active residents '*...on equal terms with other residents in the Danish society*' (Nyidanmark, 2021; Retsinformation.dk, 2021). More specifically, municipalities have since 1999 been responsible for ensuring newly arrived refugees' access to Danish language lessons, housing facilities, assistance in entering the Danish labour market, as well as introductions to Danish culture, norms, responsibilities, and rights (Pedersen, 2014; Jakobsen et al, 2021). Since 2015, when millions of people fled their homeland and crossed Europe's borders to seek protection (Eurostat, 2022) Danish policies for asylum and integration have gone through major changes. Over time, priorities have shifted from ensuring refugees' full incorporation in society, to emphasizing primarily their employment and self-sufficiency, and then again to promoting their repatriation. These shifts have been explicitly actualized through several concrete reforms, which I will outline in the following.

Since 2015 extensive policy tightening have been enacted, justified by an interested in protecting Denmark's national welfares and deterring asylum seekers from seeking protection in Demark (Vitus and Jarlby, 2021; The Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2016). As Jørgen and Shapiro (2019) underline, while the Aliens and Integration Act changed averagely once a month from 2001 to 2009, (Gammeltoft-

Hansen and Whyte, 2011), in August 2018, the Minister of Integration Inger Støjberg, celebrated tightening no. 100 in three years. These policy tightening have arguably exacerbated the living conditions for refugees in Denmark (Vitus and Jarby, 2021, Rytter and Ghandchi, 2020; Jørgensen and Shapiro, 2019; Shapiro and Jørgensen, 2021). In 2016 an amendment to the Integration Act was agreed by the government, the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) and the Unions to improve labour market integration for refugees, which initiated a new model for the three-year integration programme. Besides being enrolled in Danish language classes, refugees are now to participate in internships or job-training schemes no later than two weeks after being granted temporary residence permit and arriving in the municipality. An integration contract is to be agreed between the municipality and the refugee, specifying employment objectives, as well as training and activities to achieve those objectives (The Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2021; Jakobsen, 2021). The municipalities receive a reimbursement which is reduced over time from 80% in the first four weeks' reimbursement seniority, 40% from week 5-26, 30% from week 27-52 and 20% from after week 52 (Pedersen et al., 2019), which provide strong economic incentives for municipalities to help newly arrived refugees into employment (Jakobsen, 2021). As emphasized by Arendt (2019), these reforms marked a shift from a 'human capital' policy to a 'jobs first' policy.

These political tightening and the increasing focus on refugees' self-sufficiency and employment, led up to a reinforced emphasis on refugees' temporary protection and repatriation. In 2016, an affiliation consideration was withdrawn from refugees, which meant that their engagement in and attachment to Denmark would no longer be considered when applying for extension of residence permits (Danish Refugee council, 2019a, 2021; Folketinget, 2019). The lengths of refugees' residences granted were reduced to one to two years at a time, and refugees must now be repatriated as soon as the conditions in their country of origin allow it. Since 2017, asylum seekers have been permitted to obtain a residence permit under three types of protection: §7.1 *convention protection*, §7.2 *individual temporary protection*, and §7.3 *general temporary protection* (Aliens Act, 2017; Danish Refugee council, 2021). In 2019 a 'paradigm shift', enacted in Law No. L 140, underlined a shifting political focus from integration to repatriation. With initiation of the Repatriation Act, several measurements were effectuated to reinforce an emphasis on refugees' temporary protection and enable their prospects for repatriating (Retsinformation.dk, 2021). Essentially, these political initiatives have meant that refugees' legislative rights for staying in Denmark, have become considerably more temporary and uncertain.

### 1.3. MUNICIPALITIES' IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL INTEGRATION POLICY WORKERS

While integration and repatriation policies in Denmark are formulated at a national level, the responsibility and tasks related to implementation these policies, are decentralised to the municipalities. Hence, while national policies and guidelines are in place, the implementation efforts and support offered to newly arrived refugees, take many different forms and are shaped by local priorities, resources and values within the municipalities (Pedersen, 2013; Danish Refugee Council, 2012; Arendt et al, 2016, Jakobsen et al, 2021). In connection with the 2019 paradigm shift, the integration programme for newly arrived refugees changed its name to the *'Self-sufficiency and repatriation programme'* (The Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2021). The programme still prescribes newly arrived refugees to be ensured housing placement, employment-oriented activities, and Danish language classes shortly after arriving in the municipalities. However, since 2019, municipal caseworkers have been obliged to regularly inform refugees about their possibility of repatriation with financial support from the state (Folketinget, 2019; Retsinformation.dk, 2019; The Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2021). The repatriation effort has been officially prescribed to be seen in connection with the integration efforts provided to newly arrived persons, and rests on the expectation that: *'A successful integration process, where a person has retained his / her ability to act, being responsible and committed to work, education and leisure, forms a good starting point for a return to the home country or a previous country of residence'* (Retsinformation.dk, 2019, 2021). Accordingly, municipalities have since 2019 been expected to facilitate refugees' active participation in Danish society, while simultaneously discussing their opportunities for repatriation. While Danish policies underwent these changes, the number of refugees granted residence permit decreased considerably from 10,849 in 2015, to 2,750 in 2017, and to 601 in 2020 (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2017; 2020).

Danish municipalities have had to adapt their implementation practices and activities to the lower number of arriving refugees as well as to the shifting political focus from integration to repatriation. Many municipalities have consequently had to reduce their employees and integration efforts for newly arrived refugees (Jakobsen et al, 2021), and the paradigm shift has fundamentally changed the integration ideals, since municipalities now are instructed to foster refugees' repatriation rather than their integration (Bredgaard and Ravn, 2021 Retsinformation.dk, 2019). A vast body of literature has recognized how policy implementation is shaped by the discretion, decisions, and actions of welfare professionals (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000, Brodtkin, 2015; Caswell, 2020). It is therefore important to direct attention to local integration policy workers (LIPWs), since they play a key role translating policies into everyday realities, and thereby shaping the context of opportunities in, which young refugees unfold their lives. Given their position at the frontline of policy implementation, they can provide unique insights into how broader political structures affect municipalities' implementation practices, and ultimately

their opportunities for facilitating a supportive context for young refugees. For these reasons, I have explored not only the experienced of young refugees, but also included explorations of the experiences of LIPWs in the frontline of policy implementation at a municipal level in Denmark.

## 1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This PhD research is nested under the research project '*Junctures of change in the integration of young refugees*' which I have carried out together with my colleagues and supervisors Kathrine Vitus and Morten Skovdal and supported by Det Frie Forskningsråd [Grant Number DFF - 7015-00023]. I have been responsible for carrying out work package 2, uniting explorations of 'practice' and 'experience':

Areas of interest	Research questions	Work packages
<b>Policy</b>	How have national policies evolved during 2015-2020?  How do they frame guidelines for integration programs in the municipalities?  How has policy informed the structural context for young refugees' life trajectories in two different municipalities?	1. Project team (KV, MS, Id)
<b>Practice</b>	How are national policies actualized and what is concretely being done to support young refugees' resettlement in Danish municipalities?  How do LIPWs experience that changing integration policies and municipality implementation practices affect their opportunities for supporting young refugees' resettlement?	2. PhD research (LD)
<b>Experience</b>	How do young refugees experience the first period of their resettlement in Danish municipalities?  What do young refugees experience as influential for their resettlement, and for their possibilities for directing their lives towards the futures, they wish to live?	
<b>Theory</b>	How can unpacking 'junctures of change' help us understand the interplay of factors that facilitate or undermine the integration of young refugees to Danish society?	3. Project team (KV, MS, Id)

This PhD research set out to explore the interplay between young refugees' experiences of resettling in Danish municipalities, and how key features of policy and

practice influence the conditions of their experiences. More specifically, the research design and data collection have been guided by the following research question:

*How do young refugees experience their first period of resettlement, and how do LIPWs experience that integration policies and municipality practices affect their possibilities for supporting them through these processes?*

Since the aforementioned paradigm shift towards repatriation occurred concurrently with the data collection, it shook the entire foundation for young refugees' being in Danish society, as well as for LIPWs' roles and realities when translating policies into every practices. These events therefore urged for the objectives to embrace a sharper attention to the study participants' experiences of their new realities in the limbo between integration and repatriation. The following sub-questions have therefore been developed to embrace these changes, as well as to specify the focus for my examination. The sub-questions are listed in the following table, which includes reference to the articles, in which each question will be addressed:

Young refugees' resettlement experiences
<p><b>Article 1:</b> Taking control and reorienting future aspirations: How young refugees in Denmark navigate life between integration and repatriation</p> <p><b>Sub-questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do young refugees experience the first period of their resettlement?</li> <li>What do young refugees experience as influential for their resettlement, and for their possibilities for directing their lives towards the futures, they wish to live?</li> </ul>
LIPWs' experiences of policy implementation and practice
<p><b>Article 2:</b> 'It is as if we insert a conflict into the conversation, that wasn't there before, right?' Local Policy Integration Workers' experiences of talking repatriation policies into being in their encounters with young refugees</p> <p><b>Sub-questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do LIPWs' understand their own roles and responsibilities?</li> <li>How do LIPWs experience talking repatriation policies into being in their conversations with young refugees?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Article 3:</b> Facilitating social support for young refugees during radical policy change: Learning from the experiences of local integration policy workers in 2018-2020</p> <p><b>Sub-questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are national policies actualized and what is concretely being done to support young refugees' resettlement in Danish municipalities?</li> <li>How do LIPWs experience that changing integration policies and municipality implementation practices affect their opportunities for supporting young refugees' resettlement?</li> </ul>



## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following sections, I will provide an overview of the existing literature relevant to this PhD research, and address the gaps in knowledge, which I seek to contribute to through this thesis.

### 2.1. THE STUDY OF YOUNG REFUGEES' RESETTLEMENT

#### *Moving away from the integration concept*

The complex processes of refugees' incorporation in host societies have been broadly covered in the literature (Eide et al, 2018; Brännström et al, 2018; Breidahl and Fersch, 2018; Rytter and Ghandchi, 2020). To describe these complex processes, the concept *integration* has been widely used in political, public, and academic debates. Yet, for decades, there has been great variation in how the concept is defined, interpreted, and applied (Rytter, 2018; Sjørslev, 2011; Ejrnæs 2002). More than a decade ago Morten Ejrnæs highlighted that '*the meaning of the concept of integration is no less than 'exceptionally unclear'*' (Ejrnæs 2002, p. 7), which is still relevant today. Skytte and Bryderup (2014) exemplified the complexity of integration by underlining that a person can be socially integrated without being culturally integrated, while a person can be integrated into the Danish education system whilst being excluded from employment. Hence, people can be integrated into some communities, whilst excluded from others (Skytte and Bryderup, 2014). Rytter (2018) cautions against misusing the concept integration and calls for what he refers to as '*Writing against integration*' (Rytter, 2018). He argues that integration has had many unforeseen consequences since it rests on widespread ideas about culture, race and belonging that reinforce an asymmetrical relationship between Danish majorities and ethnic minorities, casting ethnic minorities as inferior and suspect. In that sense, he contends that integration is not an innocent concept, but rather '*constitutive of many of the issues that it claims to address*' (Rytter, 2018, p.685). In agreement with Rytter, I have since the beginning of this PhD research sought to move away from exploring *integration* as per se. Rather, I have been concerned with the social processes, events and relations that affect young refugees' resettlement. Hence, I have addressed *integration* as a political project, which I have merely explored through the study participants' experiences of the concrete activities related to the integration programme.

#### *Resettlement*

I have been primarily interested in understanding young refugees' resettlement experiences, and how LIPWs experience their opportunities for supporting them through these processes. Resettlement has been defined in various ways. The UNHCR refers to resettlement as '*...the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another*

*State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence.*' (UNCHR, 2022a). This definition entails an expectation of the host country to eventually be granting refugees' permanent residency. However, since the aforementioned policy changes during 2016 to 2019, all residence permits granted to refugees pursuant to § 7 paragraph 1 and 2, and § 8, paragraph. 1 and 2 of the Aliens Act, are granted for the purpose of temporary residence, and not as before with the possibility of permanent residence (Nyidanmark.dk, 2019). The starting point for this research has been to address resettlement more broadly, as the multiple complex processes young refugees undergo as they seek to reorient their lives in Denmark, irrespective of the lengths of their residency.

### ***The term 'young refugees'***

In the literature young refugees have been conceptualized, and depicted, in different ways. For this thesis, I have had plentiful considerations to the choice of terminology when referring to the group of young people, which this research centres on. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention a refugee is a person who: *'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it'* (UNCHR, 2022b). Moreover, the term "refugee" is by the UNCHR defined as *'A person who meets the eligibility criteria under the applicable refugee definition, as provided for by international or regional instruments, under UNHCR's mandate, and/or in national legislation.'* (UNCHR, 2022c). I considered not applying the term *refugees* to avoid stereotyping, retaining their identities as refugees, risking obscuring the heterogeneity of their experiences or imposing a terminology on individuals that might not want to be categorized as. Previous studies emphasize that such categorization might shape *'negative interpretations of their own conditions, affect their wellbeing and constrain their abilities to move forward and build a dignified existence in exile'* (Gissi 2018, p. 539). Rather, I wanted to allow them liberating from their experiences as refugees and acknowledge their being as new individual young residents in Danish society. However, although it was not an easy choice to make, and while writing this I am still unresolved, I decided to apply the term *young refugees*. I do this to acknowledge their legal status as refugees, since, as now, holding temporary residence permits as still determines the conditions under which they unfold their lives, and the opportunities available to them.

### ***The study of young refugees***

A considerable number of scholars have touched upon the complexity and ambiguity of young refugees' concurrent agency and vulnerability (Eide et al, 2018; Wernesjö, 2012, Lems, 2020). Given young refugees' susceptibility to poor mental and physical health (Bjorkenstam et al, 2020; Gauffin and Lyytinen, 2018; Noerredam et al, 2018), lower educational outcomes (Borsch, 2019), social exclusion (Vervliet et al. 2014), and labour market marginalization (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2008), their continuous vulnerability, should not be disregarded. However, as Wernesjö (2012) emphasizes, international research must avoid generalizing refugee youth as resource-poor, and rather recognize and support their agency (Wernesjö, 2012, p. 495). Chase and colleagues (2020) draw attention to how young refugees often become subject to ambiguous descriptions as either 'abusers of the asylum system' or as vulnerable in need of care and protection. They question: *'How can we write about their agency without fostering views of young refugees as 'asylum system abusers'?*' (Chase et al, 2020, p. 463). In this research, I have sought to meet the balance of exploring young refugees' agentic capacities during resettlement, without compromising an acknowledgement of their adverse circumstances.

A vast body of existing literature has already explored the lived experiences of young refugees as they seek asylum, as well as during their reception and resettlement in host countries. Many of these studies, have acknowledged young refugees' agency and resourcefulness during these processes (Eide & Hjerm, 2013; Deveci, 2012; Watters, 2008; Belloni, 2020). Exploring unaccompanied refugee minors' experiences of ambivalence and trust, Eide and colleagues (2018) recognized their resourcefulness as they resettled in the Norwegian society. They found that over time study participants exerted more agency towards establishing social connections and strengthened their capacity to assess trustworthiness of people and institutions became more prominent (Eide, et al, 2018). Pedersen (2014) who studied the relation between belonging, practice, and social context among Shi'a Muslim Iraqi women, found them capable of creating a sense of community and belonging through social relations created in a religious milieu. Through a comparative study of unaccompanied minors in Finland and Sweden, Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017) found that they experienced social participation as creating a sense of belonging in their everyday lives. More recently, Behrendt and colleagues (2021) observed unaccompanied refugee minors demonstrating agency and adapting to changing contexts, by strategically maintaining the social relations that they consider useful. Examining how young unaccompanied refugees in Danish asylum centres construct different kinds of social relations, and the meanings that they attach to these relationships, Verdasco (2020) found that everyday rituals nurtured social relationships and held profound meaning in the context of the uncertainty which asylum-seekers faced. These studies among asylum-seeking youth, young refugees, and unaccompanied minors have in various ways shown the deeply social nature of their resilience, sense of belonging and agency (Verdasco; 2020; Eide et al, 2018). Hence, existing literature has demonstrated young refugees' capacities for strengthening their agentic capabilities, coping with hardship, and getting a sense of belonging through their engagement in social relations. A large proportion of this existing literature has focused on unaccompanied minors and asylum-seeking youth. Studies focusing on young refugees' resettlement experiences, have centred on those

who have obtained permanent residency, or those who at least have had realistic opportunities of staying permanently in the host countries. However, little is known of how young refugees experience resettling in host societies, when the premises of their rights to stay on the country, remains uncertain. While this literature is still sparse, a few emerging studies have started to engage with the prolonged uncertainty and precarious experiences of refugees' resettlement, arising from reinforced temporary circumstances of their resettlement. These will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.2. PROLONGED UNCERTAINTY AND PRECARIOUS INCLUSION**

The phenomenon of waiting in uncertainty during asylum, and its consequences, has been profoundly covered in the literature (Brekke, 2004; Griffiths, 2014). Several studies have found that living under such psychological pressure for an extended period, often has critical behavioural, psychological, and cognitive consequences (Bean et al., 2007; Fazel et al., 2012; Hvidtfeldt et al, 2020; Vitus, 2010, 2011; Vitus and Nielsen, 2010). Furthermore, asylum-seekers' uncertain circumstances are well known to cause work-related precarity (Kooy & Bowman, 2018). Sleijpen et al (2017) found that having to wait long for a residence permit appeared to negatively influence young refugees' resilience, and he therefore argues, that resilience is a dynamic process that is context and time specific. Thus, while the phenomenon and consequences of waiting and living in uncertainty is well documented in the literature, these studies have primarily focused on people waiting for asylum.

Through the empirical data conducted for this PhD research, I became increasingly more aware of how the same mechanisms of uncertainty, which for long have characterized the asylum period, had expanded into young refugees already granted asylum, and in the process of resettling. Concurrently with this PhD research, a few other studies started to acknowledge, and criticise, how the rapidly and radically changing policies have reinforced refugees' precarious inclusion and prolonged their experiences of fundamental uncertainty. Jørgensen and Shapiro (2019) noticed that every time a new policy tightening was announced, it initiated a wave of fear among refugees. Rytter and Ghandchi (2020) emphasize that since refugees never know whether their residence permit will be extended or not, it leads to uncertainty, instituted by the state. The political aspiration of returning refugees, they argue, has created a form of precarious inclusion for those following the mandatory integration programme (Rytter and Ghandchi, 2020). In a report by the Danish Refugee Council (2019) titled *'We take the dreams away from them'* volunteers reported that the series of policy tightening from 2015 to 2019 reinforced fear and insecurity among refugees. They further emphasized how the reduction in integration benefits led to social exclusion and stress (Danish Refugee Council, 2019b).

These tendencies mirror several other European countries shifting away from more permanent perspectives on refugees' residency and resettlement, which have been the

hallmarks for decades, turning towards temporary protection, and intensifying the revoking of residence permits (Brekke et al., 2020; Garvik and Valenta, 2021). Hinger and Schweitzer (2020) emphasize that contemporary integration policies and practices for refugees on temporary residence permits are no longer aimed at their becoming part of society. On the contrary, they often reflect deliberate attempts to undermine their inclusion or participation. Previous literature has referred to such tendencies as political productions of 'deportability', which for refugees implies a constant fear of involuntary repatriation (De Genova, 2013). Hence, the prolonged uncertainty arising from political turn towards repatriation, in Denmark as well as in other European contexts, are receiving increasing attention in the literature. However, the literature is still sparse, and much is yet to be learned of its implications for those unfolding their lives under these temporary conditions.

### **2.3. STUDYING THE CONTEXT OF YOUNG REFUGEES' RESETTLEMENT**

For this research, I was interested in combining insights into young refugees' resettlement experiences with an understanding of how the context, in which they unfolded in their lives, held opportunities for supporting them in a meaningful way. A number of studies have examined ways in which various forms of institutional settings can strengthen refugees' incorporation in host societies (Breidahl & Fersch, 2018; Djuve and Kavli, 2019). Several note that differences in national integration contexts affect migrants' participation in society and their feelings of belonging in local communities (Crul and Schneider, 2010; Crul et al, 2012). Contemporary welfare institutions are known to influence migrants' and refugees' socioeconomic opportunities, such as labour market and education opportunities (Söhn, 2013: 298) as well as on the sociocultural dimensions of their incorporation in host societies (Breidahl and Fersch, 2018). Several studies have focused specifically on educational institutions and found these having great potential for supporting the inclusion of young refugees (Pastoor, 2015; Borsch et al, 2019; Taylor and Sidhu 2012; Block et al. 2014). Exploring how school practices and resources can support the integration of young refugees, Borsch et al (2019) found that facilitation of language acquisition, commitment to nurturing positive inter-ethnic relationships, a sense of collective responsibilities and an active promotion of inclusive school ethos, were decisive for promoting young refugees' social capital and inclusion in schools. Civil society and NGOs have likewise a long history of contributing to the support of refugees' inclusion in society (LG Insight, 2017, 2019; Frederiksen and Grubb, 2021; Grubb and Vitus, 2022). Civil society have been found to play a significant role in co-creation with municipalities, helping vulnerable groups to establish social relationships and become included in social communities and to establish creating social relationships (Frederiksen & Grubb, 2021).

In a Danish context, where municipalities since 1999 have carried the primary responsibility for implementing the integration programme and facilitating refugees'

incorporation in society, municipalities are known to take widely different approaches and strategies. Although the literature is still limited, a few studies indicate that municipalities bring uneven efforts into their programmes, and the local support they offer newly arrived refugees take many different forms (Pedersen, 2013; Danish Refugee Council, 2012; Arendt et al, 2016, Jakobsen et al, 2021). This calls for more transparent knowledge transfer between municipal implementation practices to build on and learn from. While frontline implementation work in Denmark has received attention in other fields, such as employment (Caswell, 2020), less attention has been paid to the frontline experiences of implementing integration policies in a Danish context.

Internationally, a few more studies have explored the complex processes of municipalities' implementing practices, when translating integration policies into everyday realities and facilitating refugees' incorporation into host societies (Belabas and Gerrits 2017; James and Julian, 2021; Viola et al., 2018; Larrison and Raadschelders 2020; Padovan-Özdemir and Moldenhawer 2017; Fernandes, 2015). James and Julian (2021) found that frontline professionals made a clear distinction between policy objectives and implementation programmes and interpreted the policy and the programmes through the lens of their worldviews and personal values, which impacted on the refugee policy implementation. As Viola and colleagues (2018) emphasized, the route to integration passes through the practical sphere of welfare provisions. The social workers were identified as key to promote integration, acting as "relational bridged" between cultural diversities, immigrants' heritage, and the mainstream culture.

Thus, there is a solid consensus across a wide body of literature, that the institutional context, in which refugees unfold their lives, hold the potential for strengthening their well-being, the opportunities available to them, and ultimately their incorporation in host societies – or to undermine these same processes. Furthermore, there is a wide acknowledgement in the literature that the values, interpretation, and discretion those welfare professionals in frontline of policy implementation impact on the contextual support and opportunities available to refugees. With this research, I therefore seek to understand how integration and repatriation policies, as well as and municipality implementation practices, influence the context of opportunities available to young refugees. This will be elaborated in the following section.

## **2.4. STATE OF THE ART: UNITING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG REFUGEES AND LIPWS IN THE LIMBO BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND REPATRIATION**

Thus, contextual institutions' roles in shaping the life conditions and opportunities available for refugees settling in host countries, have been widely recognized in the international literature. However, in a Danish context, the literature, on how national

integration policies are interpreted and actualized into everyday practices at a municipality level, is still sparse. Moreover, little is currently known of how municipalities have adapted their local implementation practices to the radical policy turn from integration to repatriation. While the recent integration – and repatriation policies, and programmes, have been effectuated from a top-down approach, there is a need for in-depth studies of ‘bottom-up’ practices and understandings of how LIPWs’ experience implementing recent policies. Furthermore, few initiatives have been made to consult young refugees themselves about their experiences of resettling in Danish municipalities, and the activities put in place for them. While the studies on asylum-seeking and unaccompanied youth have received some research attention, less studies have followed young refugees’ resettlement experiences during the aftermath of the aforementioned policy changes. Neither have any studies, to the best of my knowledge, followed young refugees and LIPWs concurrently and longitudinally, to explore how their respective experiences change over time and relate to one another.

Contributing to filling out these gaps in knowledge, this PhD research brings new perspectives on how the mechanisms of temporality and uncertainty, which for long have characterized the asylum period, now have become prolonged into the resettlement period, and manifested in young refugees’ life experiences. Because the political turn towards repatriation reflects similar tendencies in many international contexts (Brekke et al., 2020; Garvik and Valenta, 2021; Hinger and Schweitzer (2020), the research has high international relevance. Since the empirical data collection for this PhD research was carried out longitudinally, concurrent with the aforementioned policy changes, the implications of these changes immediately manifested in the study participants’ experiences. The longitudinal study has thus become a unique possibility for capturing and understanding young refugees’ experiences of creating a life under the temporal uncertain circumstances arising from the increasing political focus on repatriation. Furthermore, it has come to offer a rare opportunity for understanding how municipalities have adapted to these rapidly and radically changing policies, and how these adaptations have shaped municipalities’ priorities, strategies, and implementation practices, as well as LIPWs’ opportunities for supporting young refugees’ resettlement.

# CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

## 3.1. INCLUSION CRITERIA AND RECRUITMENT

### 3.1.1. SELECTION OF MUNICIPALITIES

To address the research questions, I sought insight into how national integration policies are implemented and translated into everyday practices in two Danish municipalities - and how these shaped young refugees' resettlement experiences.

To ensure enough study participants, these municipalities were selected based the number of refugees aged 18-24 who had obtained temporary residence in 2017, and who had been assigned to the respective municipalities. This data was generated from The Danish Immigration Service's Statistics Service. One of the included municipalities was located near the capital Copenhagen, the other municipality was located in a more remote area of northern Jutland. Their different locations allowed me to explore of barriers and opportunities for mobilizing support for young refugees in different geographical contexts. While this study was not carried out as comparative research, I did pay careful attention to how the different contextual settings influenced the municipalities' implementation practices and the young refugees' experiences. As will be discussed in further detail in article 3, the municipalities' local organization, as well as the context of external resources of support available in their immediate geographical contexts, highly influenced their implementation practices. The following table briefly states the key figures for the two included municipalities:

	Municipality A	Municipality B
<b>Population</b>	Ca. 85.000	Ca. 65.000
<b>Region</b>	Zealand	North Denmark
<b>Area</b>	Urban	Urban
<b>Organization</b>	2018: Centralized integration department  2020: Integration team under Jobcentre	Integration team under Jobcentre
<b>Number of young refugees aged 18-24 assigned to the municipality in 2017</b>	6-10	11-15

As will be explained in further detail in section 3.1.3, I accessed the municipalities via the integration managers from each of the two municipalities.



### 3.1.2. RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG REFUGEES

I was interested in following the study participants concurrently during the first period of their resettlement to get a better understanding of their immediate experiences, as they participated in the municipal integration programme, interacted with Danish society, and settled into their new environment. Through caseworkers at the municipalities' integration departments, I invited all young refugees aged 18-24, who had obtained residence permit in 2017, to participate in the study. The number of young refugees (aged 18-24) receiving residence permits in this period was low (6-10 in Municipality A, and 11-15 in Municipality B), which challenged the recruitment process. In municipality B, four young refugees agreed to participate in the study shortly after having received the invitation in 2018. I invited these youth to a workshop, where I carefully explained the purpose of the research, as well as the conditions of their participation. I also invited interpreters to the workshop to ensure everything was translated and explained carefully to their native languages. Since these youth were recruited relative soon into the research project, I was able to follow them from 2018 to 2020. However, to ensure adequate empirical insights, I used 'snowball' sampling (Mason, 1996) and in 2019, another two young refugees were included in the study.

In municipality A, the recruitment process was a much more complicated and time-consuming process. I reached out to the young refugees through caseworkers from the integration department, who invited their young refugee clients to participate in the study on my behalf. However, after waiting for months and regularly following up with the caseworkers, no young refugees had agreed to participate in the study, which mirrors previous studies (Chase et al, 2020; Wernesjö, 2014), finding recruiting refugees through municipal departments to be time-consuming processes. Eventually, I was allowed to visit a language school to present my research in person and invite young refugees to participate. After this event four young refugees, one male and three females, agreed to attend an introduction meeting. At this meeting I carefully explained the purpose of the research, as well as the conditions of their participation, and had an interpreter explaining everything carefully into their native language. The young man agreed to participate and was therefore included in the study from 2019. However, after participating in the introduction meeting, the three young women did not wish to participate in the study. They felt stressed in their lives, due to their obligations to integration programme (language school and internships), and therefore not able to dedicate time to participate. As will be explained in further detail on page 37, carrying out photovoice is very time-consuming and requires study participants to meet with the researcher several times. It rests on the study participant to take independent action and initiatives when engaging in the photovoice exercises (Castleden, 2008; Wang). Young refugees in Denmark are already under a lot of time pressure to attend integration activities (language school, internship etc.), and will have their integration benefits detained, if they do not attend these activities. Therefore, for the young refugees to spend time on the photovoice exercise, under

these circumstances, is likely to have been too demanding for some of them to commit to. My possibilities to carry out the study fully depended on the study participants' acceptance of me taking their time and gaining insights into their life experiences (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, 2003).

To ensure adequate empirical depth, I continued my efforts trying to recruit more young refugees. The few remaining young refugees, whom I had not yet invited to participate in the study, were enrolled in a different special language school for traumatized young refugees, which I was allowed to visit. Another young man agreed to participate under the conditions that his interview was not recorded, and he did not wish to have an interpreter to be present at the interviews. He was therefore included in the study, under these conditions, from 2019. In April 2019, I went on maternity leave, which hindered me from continuing the pursue of more young study participants at that time. When I returned to work during spring 2020, I continued my efforts to recruit more young refugees in municipality A, meanwhile I continued the empirical data collection with the remaining eight youth, who were already enrolled in the study. However, due to COVID-19, the municipality institutions closed at this time, which hampered my accessibility to the relevant gatekeepers. During August and September 2020, I finally managed to recruit another four young refugees in Municipality A. Two young men were recruited through a caseworker from the integration team. Furthermore, returning to the special language school for traumatized young refugees, two young women agreed to participate in the study. Accordingly, young refugees from the two respective municipalities, with various national backgrounds (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria) were included in the study as follows:

Names*	Gender	Enrolment period	Methods applied
<b>Municipality A</b>			
<b>Adan</b>	Male	2019-2020	Interviews (n=2) & Photovoice
<b>Danie</b>	Male	2019-2020	Interviews (n=2)
<b>Aleem</b>	Male	2020	One interview (n=1)
<b>Fungai</b>	Male	2020	One interview (n=1)
<b>Sasha</b>	Female	2020	One interview (n=1)
<b>Sina</b>	Female	2020	One interview (n=1)
<b>Municipality B</b>			
<b>Mohammad</b>	Male	2018-2020	Interviews (n=3) & Photovoice
<b>Waheed</b>	Male	2018-2020	Interviews (n=3) & Photovoice
<b>Hamid</b>	Male	2018-2020	Interviews (n=3) & Photovoice
<b>Abdel</b>	Male	2018-2020	Interviews (n=3) & Photovoice
<b>Hajran</b>	Male	2019-2020	Interviews (n=2)
<b>Kadan</b>	Male	2019-2020	Interviews (n=2)
<b>Total interviews (n=24)</b>			

\*Pseudonyms have been applied to protect the study participants' identities

### 3.1.3. RECRUITMENT OF LOCAL INTEGRATION POLICY WORKERS

In both municipalities, I presented the research objectives and conditions to the managers of the integration teams and obtained their approval to undertake interviews with employees at the integration departments. Subsequently, I invited and included a total of 16 Local Integration Policy Workers (LIPWs), (8 from each municipality), who all agreed to participate in the study. These study participants were all interdisciplinary members of the municipalities' integration teams. These included caseworkers, integration advisory team members, teachers, practical social workers attached to the temporary housing facilities. Majority of the study participants had educational backgrounds as social workers. Common to all study participants was their primary responsibilities implementing activities related to the *integration programme* and the *'Self-sufficiency and repatriation programme'*. Furthermore, the integration managers from both municipalities were also included for interviews, to gain their perspectives on the municipalities' overall implementation guidelines, values, priorities, and strategies. In this article, I refer to these study participants as local integration policy workers (LIPWs) given their mutual assignment to implementing the integration/repatriation policies. The following figure provides an overview of the LIPWs included in the study:

Function	Gender	Enrolment period	Interviews
<b>Municipality A</b>			
Integration manager	Female	2018-2019	(n=3)
Integration manager	Male	2020	(n=1)
Practical social worker	Male	2018-2020	(n=3)
Practical social worker	Male	2018-2019	(n=2)
Practical social worker	Female	2018-2019	(n=2)
Caseworker	Female	2018-2020	(n=3)
Caseworker	Female	2018-2020	(n=3)
Teacher / youth counsellor	Female	2019	(n=1)
<b>Municipality B</b>			
Integration manager	Male	2018-2020	(n=3)
Member of the integration advisory board	Male	2018-2020	(n=2)
Caseworker	Female	2018-2020	(n=3)
Caseworker	Female	2018-2020	(n=3)
Caseworker	Male	2018	(n=1)
Caseworker	Male	2018	(n=1)
Caseworker	Male	2018	(n=1)
Teacher	Female	2018	(n=1)
<b>Total interviews (n=33)</b>			

## 3.2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

### 3.2.1. QUALITATIVE LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

For this PhD, I applied a qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) approach to explore the experiences of young refugees and LIPWs during a two-year period from 2018-2020. QLR offers an opportunity for capturing changes in people's lives, as well as way of exploring how individuals' change may be driven by contextual circumstances (Mølholt and Kristiansen, 2020). QLR research can unfold the ways in which people's actions are embedded in broader contexts and patterns of socio-cultural change, as well as the way people subjectively negotiate the changes that occur in their lives at times of personal life transitions (Henwood and Lang, 2003). Neale and Flowerdew (2003, p. 190) summarizes:

It is through time that we can begin to grasp the nature of social change, the mechanism and strategies used by individuals to generate and manage change in their personal lives, and the ways in which structural change impacts on the lives of individuals. Indeed, it is only through time that we can gain a better appreciation of how the personal and the social, agency and structure, the micro and macro are interconnected and how they come to be transformed.

Neale and Flowerdew (2003:190)

The longitudinal approach has been an invaluable way of addressing the mechanisms and strategies used by the young refugees and the LIPWs to manage and navigate in the structural context of rapidly and radically shifting integration policies. Mølholt and Kristiansen (2020) further emphasizes that following a group of people through time, combining repetitive interviews with data gathered about their context, can provide a unique insight to how people are influenced by policies and contexts (Mølholt and Kristiansen, 2020). QLR research is distinguished by the methodical way in which temporality is designed into the research process and make change a central analytic focus (Holland et al. 2006). *Time* becomes a way of understanding how individual lives, experiences and actions are connected to, and embedded in, larger structural societal processes (Mølholt and Kristiansen, 2020). Hence, the QLR approach allowed me to explore how the study participants' experiences changed over time, and how these changes related to altering context of radically and rapidly changing policies.

Holland et al (2006) recognises the flexibility of QLR as a value, which has the potential for development to take place throughout the entire research process, in terms of adjusting methods, analytical attentions

and theorization. During the two-year study, methods and theoretical framework were developed and adapted in line with contextual developments in the field and new emerging empirical insights. While the original overall objective was persistent throughout the data collection, over time, I developed the sub-questions to embrace a sharper attention to the study participants' experiences of their new realities, as explained on page 20. Furthermore, as previously explained, the photovoice exercise turned out to be too time-consuming and demanding for some of the study participants. The QLR approach was therefore useful for ensuring enough time to adjust the methods to meet the communication needs and preferences of the young study participants. In the following sections, I will elaborate on how the longitudinal research design was actualized to capture the experiences of the young refugees and the LIPWs respectively.

### **3.2.2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOVOICE TO EXPLORE YOUNG REFUGEE EXPERIENCES**

The longitudinal approach was a useful way of exploring how the young refugees navigated through societal surroundings during the first period of resettlement in the municipalities. Combining repeated in-depth interviews and photovoice exercises as the two main qualitative research methods, I sought profound insight into young refugees' experiences and reflections during the two-year period. The semi-structured interviews were inspired by narrative research, in the sense that they endeavoured to open for insights of where young refugees are coming from, their current life experiences and their reflections of where they are hoping life will take them in the future (Glavind Bo et al, 2016). The photovoice exercises were inspired by Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (Wang, 2006; Castleden et al, 2008; Skovdal, 2011), allowing study participants greater involvement in generating the data. In the following, I will elaborate on how and why these methods were combined – and how they served as useful ways of capturing the young refugees' experiences as they resettled in the municipalities.

#### ***Repeated semi-structured interviews***

The repeated interviews were carried out as qualitative semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, and Tanggaard, 2015; Kvale, 2002). They were inspired by narrative research (Glavind et al, 2016) and guided by a phenomenological approach (Juul and Pedersen, 2012). Firstly, while the primary focus was centred on the young refugees' resettlement experiences, these experiences were explored with careful attention to the young refugees' past experiences and future expectations – acknowledging how understandings of past, present, and future influence one another (Glavind et al, 2016). Secondly, in the interviews I sought to allow the study participants most possible space to elaborate and reflect on themes and events, that they themselves found meaningful in their lives and relevant to share. Through these stories, attention was drawn to what held meaning to the study participants, and what they considered

influential for their present lives and possibilities for reaching their aspired futures. While I was interested in understanding the young refugees' resettlement, guided by a phenomenological approach (Juul and Pedersen, 2012) I chose to put my theoretical and conceptual understandings in brackets, and meet the young refugees openly, listening to them, and acknowledging them as experts of their own lives. While we can never completely step out of the world, we ourselves belong to and gain an authentic understanding of the study participants' experienced worlds (Juul and Pedersen, 2012), I made an effort to listen carefully and ask in ways that did not restrict new discoveries of what held meaning to them.

Accordingly, shortly after the study participants had agreed to participate in the research project, the data collection was initiated with semi-structured interview where participants were asked to share their experiences and reflections related to four main life stages:

- i) Their life experiences before arriving in Denmark
- ii) The period from arriving in Denmark until obtaining residence permit
- iii) Their life experiences since arriving in the municipality
- iv) Their aspirations and expectations of where the future will take them

See appendix B for the full interview guide. Hence, guided by an open phenomenological approach (Juul and Pedersen, 2012) my starting point was to keep the interviews as open as possible, guided by an overall focus on these life stages. I sought to allow the informants most possible freedom to share their experience that they themselves found most at stake in their everyday lives. In practice this worked well for some of the study participants, who had the communicative skills to share more detailed and reflective accounts of their experiences and perspectives. However, for others, who were more reserved, I applied the more of the specific questions in the interview guide, to guide the study participants to elaborate on their experiences. During the two-year period a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> interview were carried out with each of the study participants who were enrolled in 2018. These interviews centred on the same life stages as in the first round. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> round of interviews, the study participants were further asked to reflect on experiences and possible changes in their lives since the previous interview.

Accordingly, the longitudinal study design enabled the me to explore if and how young refugees' self-understandings and expectations of their own future possibilities changed through time, as well as how these were influenced by their present life conditions and broader events happening concurrently in society. Whilst the

interviews were inspired by narrative interviews in terms of their open approach, and their attention to the interconnection of past, present, and future perspectives, they differed in a significant way. Whilst narrative interviews are often used as a single interview with a retrospective starting point focusing mainly on past experiences (Glavind et al, 2016), the qualitative longitudinal approach, which was applied in this study, is characterised by following informants through a specific period of time in order to understand the changes as they unfolded (Mølholt and Kristiansen, 2020). The way in which researchers follow individuals in real time, differs from the retro perspective aspect of narrative interviews' that rests on the individuals' memories of the past (Mølholt and Kristiansen, 2020).

For those young refugees recruited later into the study period, I applied a similar approach, even though I was unable to follow them for as long, as those recruited in 2018. As for the final four study participants, who were recruited in 2020, I merely explored their experiences through a single semi-structured interview, where they similarly shared their experiences and reflections on the periods stated above. However, since I was unable to follow their experiences over time, these four study participants reflected retrospectively on their resettlement experiences during the two-year period, since their arrival in the municipality. For those who had not yet acquired language skills to adequately articulate their experiences in Danish or English, I arranged for interpreters to participate in the interviews. Reflections on the use of interpreters will be address on in section 3.3.4

In combination with the repeated interviews, I also carried out interviews with several of the young study participants. Walking interviews are a flexible, adaptive, and dynamic. They allow participants to share their thoughts about their environment while walking, and the places that have meaning their lives (King and Woodroffe, 2017). The walking interviews were more informal, unrecorded, and somewhat limited, since we talked in Danish or English without the presence of an interpreter. However, they were very valuable in terms of building trust with the study participants and opening up for their experiences of the places in their local environment. Over time, as their Danish skills developed, and as we got to know each other better, these walks also became invaluable ways for study participant to share more personal experiences. As in ethnographic research, Spradley (1979) emphasizes that only through a *Rapport Process*, will informants begin to engage fully in the research and understand their own role as informing the researcher. This research was not ethnographic, and neither was participant observation included in my approach. Still, Spradley's acknowledgement of the value of time and trust in qualitative research, was highly relevant. As time passed by, the young study participants' understandings of my position as a researcher enhanced, and through our walks, they began to share more personal and detailed accounts of their experiences. Eventually at the final stage of my research, those study participants who were recruited in 2018 approached me on their own initiative to share information with me, which they found important for the research.

### *Photovoice exercises to capture and visualise young refugees' experiences*

I incorporated a participatory research approach (Cashman, 2008) to embrace the value of gaining insights into the life worlds of the young refugees by involving them in the process of generating knowledge. The participatory research approach was actualized in two ways; a) by inviting a group of young people with refugee background, who had lived in Denmark for several years to participate in a research advisory group to share their input on the research design, and b) by applying the research method photovoice in an interactive way, that allowed study participants a great sense of ownership of the data collection and to participate actively in the data analysis process.

Previous research has proven it useful working together with study participants to identify meaningful ways of answering the research questions (Wallerstein and Duran, 2010). Three young people with refugee background, who were previous study participants from former research project undertaken by colleagues from this research project, formed the advisory group. They were invited for a workshop to share their input on ethical, cultural, and methodological considerations when conducting research with young refugees. More specifically, they contributed with useful perspectives on how to engage with sensitive questions around refugees' flight and often traumatic pasts, as well as methodological recommendations on how to actualise the photovoice method in way that would be practical and manageable for young people. This workshop functioned very well, and I sought to apply their reflections and recommendations into the data collection material.

Most of the young refugees included in the study, were invited to participate in the photovoice exercises to give them more ownership during the data collection as well as a chance of capturing and sharing their experiences visually. Photovoice has previously been proven a useful tool for identifying young people's challenges, visualizing their voices, and initiating dialogue between study participants and policymakers (Wang, 2006), as well as for highlighting coping strategies and facilitating action (Skovdal, 2011). This study was inspired by these researchers' work with photovoice, and further built on the experiences of Castleden et al, (2008) who found that extending photovoice data collection over a prolonged period with regular feedback loops, contributes to establishing rapport and build trust with participants. Accordingly, these photovoice exercises were carried out over the two-year study period as a part of the QLR approach. This allowed the study participants the opportunity of engaging in an ongoing participatory analysis of the data by analyzing their own photos, reflect, and elaborate on the meanings they attached to them. Photovoice was a beneficial way of overcoming initial language barriers and providing young refugees with the opportunity of visually sharing the stories and experiences they themselves found meaningful. See the materials for the photovoice exercises at appendix A, with more details on the content and procedure of how these exercises were carried out. For the photovoice exercises, participants were invited to



elaborate on the meanings attached to the photos, either by writing notes in a notebook or by elaborating verbally in an interview, depending on their preferences and academical level. As a part of this process, one of the participants began, on his own accord, to share comprehensive written letters of his experiences and reflections. In agreement with this study participant, these letters were included as a part of the research data in the data analysis. See appendix C. Since some study participants were recruited late in the study, and others were too emotionally affected by their traumatic past to meaningfully engage with the exercise, not all participated in Photovoice. Furthermore, among those participating in the photovoice exercise, not all had produced the number of photos, which I had anticipated. However, for those engaging in the photovoice exercise, discussing the photos in the interviews worked well for opening for reflections and experiences, which may not otherwise have emerged in the interviews. Further reflections on the implications, opportunities, limitations, and ethical considerations of the photovoice exercises, will be addressed in section 3.3.1.

### **3.2.3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS TO EXPLORE LIPWS' EXPERIENCES**

In both municipalities semi-structured interviews were carried out with key persons involved with implementing the integration programme. Guided by the research questions, I sought to explore LIPWs' experiences of implementing national policies within their municipalities. I sought to gain an overview of what concretely was being done to support young refugees' resettlement in their respective municipalities. Furthermore, as the policies changed over time, in 2019 and 2020, I incorporated questions to explore how the LIPWs experienced that changing integration policies and municipality implementation practices affected their opportunities for supporting young refugees' resettlement. As already stated, Danish integration policies changed rapidly and radically during the study period, meanwhile the number of refugees granted residence permit decreased significantly. The longitudinal approach allowed me to explore how the two municipalities adapted their implementation practices over time, in line with the changing policies and demographics of arriving refugees. Ultimately, it allowed me to explore how these structures influenced the discretion, actions, and opportunities of LIPWs to meet the needs of young refugees. See appendix B for the interview guide used for these interviews.

## **3.3. EMPIRICAL DATA LIMITATIONS, POSITIONING AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **3.3.1. REFLECTIONS ON THE EMPIRICAL DATA**

The empirical data contributed with insights into the experiences of the young refugees and the LIPWs, during a period, which marked a particularly changeable

time in the historical context of Danish asylum and integration policies. However, the empirical data has some limitations, which I find it important to address.

The uneven gender ratio of the study participants reflects the larger gender ratio of young refugees aged 18-24, who had obtained residence permit and were assigned to the case study municipalities at the time. I am aware that this uneven gender ratio limits the possibilities for engaging in more nuanced gendered analysis of potential differences in their experiences and circumstances.

Furthermore, as accounted for on in section 3.1.2. it was not possible to recruit as many young refugees in 2018, as I had anticipated. In practice, this meant that for those recruited later into the study period, I was not able to follow their real time experiences but had to rely on their retrospective accounts of their experiences. This hindered the possibility of gaining insights into their immediate responses and reactions concurrently with circumstances they faced. Narrative knowledge is known as not only recalls of the past, but rather retrospective, reflexive, and interpretive depictions of past events, in the light of current understanding and evaluation of their meaning (Polkinghorne, 2005; Antoft and Thomsen, 2002). While the retrospective interviews might have limited the possibility of capturing some nuances and complexities of their experiences, it may on the other hand have made them better equipped to reflect upon their past experiences and the meanings they attached to them. Furthermore, building trust and rapport with study participants is essential, but certainly requires time (Spradley, 1979). As Lems et al. (2020) emphasizes, especially for refugees, it takes time before they shift from recounting officially acknowledged stories, until they start opening up with more complex reflections of themselves. For these reasons, the level of trust and rapport, between the study participants and I, was stronger with those recruited early in the study period, as compared with those recruited later into the study. This is reflected in the level of depth and details in their accounts of their experiences, which strengthened every time we met. That being said, the single interview carried out with Aleem in 2020, was remarkably profound. When we first met a Saturday morning, we went for a very long walk together, talking for hours. At this time, Aleem was fluent in Danish, which meant we could speak freely without an interpreter. We ended up spending most of the day together, and I carried out the recorded interview at the end of the day. This day with Aleem did not provide the same amount of time together, which I had with the other study participants recruited in 2018. Or for that matter, it can by no means compare to the level of trust, which I have previous built with study participants, while undertaking ethnographic fieldwork in a former research project (Andersen, 2012). Nevertheless, the delicate but certainly present trust between Aleem and I, was invaluable. Aleem spoke ever more detailed about his experiences the longer we walked and spent time together. It reassured me that time, no matter how little, time matters. Another consequence arising from the late recruitment of some of the young refugees, was that I was not able to fully cover, how they themselves experienced the concrete and extensive integration efforts, which were initiated in Municipality A during 2018 (as presented

in article 3). Nevertheless, by analysing all the empirical data, regardless of length of the young refugees' enrolment in the study, I was still able to examine how their experiences, and what they pointed to as influential in their lives, corresponded with the context of opportunities encompassed in the municipalities' implementation practices.

As for the LIPWs, I would have liked to include a final interview in 2020 with all the informants, who I had interviewed in 2018, in order to get even deeper understanding of their experiences of the changing policies and practises from 2018 to 2020. However, I was hindered from doing this. Firstly, because several of my informants, who had participated in interviews during 2018 and 2019, were no longer employed, when I returned to the field in 2020. Secondly, it would have required more time and resources to do this, than I had available. I do however believe that the empirical data I managed to conduct in 2020, encompasses adequate level of depth to understand the LIPWs' experiences of the mechanisms of change occurring at the time.

### **3.3.2. PROTECTION AND ANONYMITY**

As for all study participants, both the young refugees and LIPWs, I thoroughly explained the purpose and conditions of the research, at the beginning of their enrollment in the study. I emphasized that their participation was voluntary, and ensured that they were aware of their possibility of withdrawing from the study at any given point if they no longer wished to participate. For the young refugees, this information was interpreted and explained in their native languages by interpreters. Written consent forms were formulated with the assistance of legal advisors at Aalborg University to ensure their ethical standards, and that they complied with GDPR regulations. These written consent forms were also translated into the young study participants' native languages and obtained by all study participants before initiating any research activities. For the photovoice exercise, additional 'photo release forms' provided study participants the opportunity to carefully select, which pictures they wished to hand over to the research project, and possibly being published. Furthermore, the young study participants were instructed in how to obtain written content from people they wished to photograph (Harley, 2012; Wang, 2006). All empirical data has been anonymized to protect the identity of the study participants and has been stored securely according to the GDPR guidelines.

As for the young refugees, I devoted several further ethical considerations to ensure their safety and well-being while participating in the study. As already emphasized, young refugees often carry heavy biographic burdens of traumatic experiences upon arrival in the municipalities (Bean et al, 2007; Fazel et al, 2012), and the very first period of resettlement is known to be characterized by confusion and insecurity (Jørgensen and Shapiro, 2019). For these reasons, I sought to approach them carefully through the caseworkers, who they already knew. The caseworkers were able to indicate if some of the refugees were too psychologically unwell to participate in the

study. Throughout the data collection, I was very aware of the sensitivity of the young refugees' experiences and circumstances, and was careful to let the young refugees' share what they themselves found comfortable talking about.

In terms of ensuring anonymity, this is particularly important since the foundation for young refugees' residence permit is very fragile. Asylum seeking refugees in Denmark can be waiting up to several years before knowing if they are to be granted residence permit (Hvidtfeldt et al, 2020). Even when obtaining residence permit, this is usually only valid for up to two years at the time before they must reapply for extension (Retsinformation.dk, 2021). Additionally, with the new L140 legislation reinforcing repatriation, the possibility for having residence permits extended have become even more uncertain (Retsinformation.dk, 2019). Some of the young refugees participating in this study, were concerned if the photos they shared in the photovoice exercise, would compromise their cases, so that their residence permits would be withdrawn, and they would be deported from Denmark. Furthermore, since some of the study participants (and/or their families) had fled, because they had been politically persecuted, revealing their identities and locations could compromise their safety.

Therefore, another ethical consideration to emphasize, is the implications of withdrawing from the research and maintaining anonymity when study participants engage with photovoice. Whilst Switzer and colleagues (2015) stress, ethical guidelines are at times disregarded by study participants who may take photographs of people without their consent (Switzer et al, 2015). Other researchers highlight that when using digital photography for photovoice exercises, study participants may share copies of images on social media and thereby lose control of how these are redistributed, misinterpreted, and possibly misused (Creighton et al, 2018; Chapman et al, 2017). In a set of ethical considerations Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) advocated for ensuring participants' rights to withdraw at any time, as well as protecting their anonymity. Written consent forms ensure study participants' consent to these terms. However, whilst I acknowledge that these procedures are sensible starting points for good ethical research practice, written consents are not sufficient to overcome the challenge of maintaining complete anonymity in photovoice studies. In fact, they might cloud crucial ethical considerations, especially for young people with refugee backgrounds. For these reasons, I encouraged study participants, to carefully consider if the pictures, which they wished to share with the research project, could contain any unwanted information about their identity. Accordingly, not all study participants wished to participate in the photovoice exercises. Among those who did participate, most were reluctant to share personal photos. They rather shared more general photos of the places around the city such as of the train station, education departments and of the streets in the town where they lived. For this reason, the photos in themselves did not hold very nuanced details of their experiences. However, while not all study participants wished to hand over the more personal photos which they had taken to the research project, they were happy to share them in person and talk about the meanings they attached to them during the interviews. In that way, as

previously explained, the photos became a useful way of opening for different experiences in the interviews, which might not otherwise have emerged. Accordingly, the primary empirical insights arose from the talks we had around the photos, as well as from the notes that study participants had written about the photos, rather than from the photos themselves.

### **3.3.3. POSITIONING**

While the recruitment process proceeded well in municipality B, it was as already stated a more lengthy process to recruit through caseworkers in municipality A. As a researcher, I must critically reflect upon my own role in the field, and the impact this role has had on the research outcomes (Hastrup, 2003). Reflecting on the recruitment process, I am aware that my own position as a researcher might not have been fully understood, when I reached out to the young refugees through the caseworkers. It is likely to expect, that although the caseworkers explained my role as a researcher, the young refugees might have considered me to be yet another bureaucratic person. In the interviews, the young refugees subsequently told me how confused and overwhelmed they felt when arriving in the municipality, receiving numerous bureaucratic letters, and meeting several new people from various institutions, in a new society they did not yet understand. As previously stated, I had ensured that the consent forms were detailed enough to explain the conditions and ethical implications of the research, including how I would comply with the GDPR guidelines. However, I now realise that the amount of information included in the consent forms might have had a discouraging effect on some of the study participants. Waleem, who had initially agreed to participate in the study, changed his mind when being asked to sign the consent form. He expressed that it made him feel confused and scared to fill in 'another written document' and therefore he hesitated to participate. I was careful not to pressure him and told him to take all the time he needed, to think it through. A month later, when I contacted him again, he told me that he had thought it through, and that he was happy to participate. He then signed the consent form, was enrolled in the study, and engaged actively in the research activities thereafter.

### **3.3.4. THE PRESENCE OF AN INTERPRETER**

Most of the time, carrying out the interviews with an interpreter, proceeded well. Even though most of the young study participants had acquired some level of Danish, having the interpreter present enabled them to share more detailed accounts of their experiences. Working with an interpreter does however entail the risk of losing significant details in translation. Also, how the interpreter is positioned in relation to the informants (gender, age and class), may affect the data collected (Buur 1999, p.60). The language barrier may create a distance between me as a researcher, and the study participants. Just as I, as a researcher, need time to build rapport and trust with study participants, it may also take time for the study participants to feel confident the presence of an interpreter.

Another influential aspect was the financial cost of having an interpreter present at the interviews. As I was restricted by a tight research budget, I had to prioritize the time I engaged interpreters for the interviews to just two hours at the time. Especially, during the first interviews in 2018, it would have been very useful to have had an interpreter present for several more hours at the time, to get to know the study participants better. However, during the follow up interviews in 2019, and especially in 2020, the study participants' level of Danish improved significantly, which allowed us to spend more time together talking without the presence of an interpreter.

## CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Thematical analysis*

The empirical data (transcribed interviews, notes, and letters from the photovoice exercises) was coded inductively in NVivo into two separate coding frames: one for the young refugees and one for the LIPWs respectively. Inspired by Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis, I coded the empirical data in each of the coding frames into global themes, organising themes and basic themes.

Descriptive Basic themes were derived from the text and represented immediate emerging themes close to the text. These basic themes enabled me to gain an overview of emerging themes across the empirical data, and the prevalence of these themes across the study participants. Subsequently, the coded basic themes were grouped together to summarize more abstract principles represented by organizing themes. The global themes were guided by the research questions and helped to clarify the overall focus of the analysis. As the coding frame developed, I was surprised by the number of basic themes emerging, which centred on consequences of the political focus on repatriation and the changing municipality practices. Therefore, as explained on in section 1.4, I added a couple more sub-questions to be addressed and noted these as further global themes in the coding frame. Together, the clustered basic themes and organizing themes contributed to address the overall research questions raised in the global themes.

In the NVivo coding frames, I further coded the empirical data into subcategories representing the two municipalities, the times when the interviews were conducted, as well as individual characteristics ('case classifications') of the study participants. By coding the empirical data into these sub-categories enabled me to explore possible differences between the two municipalities as well as possible differences in the study participants' experiences, based on their individual characteristics. Furthermore, it enabled me to analyse how the study participants' experiences changed over time, how the young refugees' and LIPWs' experiences related with one another, and how these experiences related to the reoccurring events of changing policies and municipality implementation practices. This analysis allowed me to explore how the young refugees' self-understandings and expectations of their own future opportunities changed over time. Finally, it allowed me to examine how the municipalities' implementation practices, values, organization, and priorities changed over time.

### *Analysis of the individual study participants' experiences*

The thematic network analysis was useful in terms of gaining an overview of emerging themes across the empirical data, and the correlations between the dataset as stated above. However, the NVivo coding somewhat fragmented the transcriptions into themes. The analysis was therefore further guided by a phenomenological approach (Juul and Pedersen, 2012), focusing on the ways in which resettlement was experienced and lived by each study participant. Hence, to ensure adequate attention to the full course and coherency of each the study participants' experiences, I therefore ensured to regularly re-read the entire interview transcriptions for each study participant in full length, and endeavoured to ensure detailed, rigorous, and systematic engagement with each participant's interview transcripts. Throughout the articles, I strived to ensure adequate transparency of the analytical processes, and to present the study participants' experiences as transparent and descriptive as possible, by included many quotes. Especially for article 1, this individual analysis enabled me to get a better understanding of each the study participants' resettlement trajectories, and how each of them navigated their lives during the study period.

### *The key concepts and theoretical framework*

As outlined above, the empirical data was conducted, coded, and analysed inductively, and guided by the research questions, rather than by a predefined theoretical framework. Arising from a dialogue between the research objectives, the empirical analysis and existing literature, I explored relevant concepts and theoretical framework to discuss, unfold and nuance the empirical findings. For both the young refugees and the LIPWs, the focal point for my empirical analysis, was to explore their experiences, navigation, and agentic possibilities for gaining a sense of control, within the shifting and uncertain context, in which they were embedded. The following figure provides an overview of the connection between the empirical focus, and the conceptual and theoretical framework, which I applied in the three articles:

Empirical focus	Conceptual and theoretical framework	Article
Young refugees' experiences when shifting policies change the conditions for their lives.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Experiences and navigation</li><li>- Future aspirations</li><li>- Opportunities directing their lives towards these aspirations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Social navigation</b> (Vigh, 2009, 2010)</li><li>- <b>Capacities to aspire</b> (Appadurai, 2004)</li><li>- <b>Agency</b> (Barbalet, 1998)</li></ul>	1
LIPWs' experiences when shifting policies change the conditions for their work.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Experiences of their own roles and responsibilities as LIPWs</li><li>- Experiences of their opportunities responding to young refugees' needs in a context of changing policies and municipality implementation practices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Moral agency</b> (Zacka, 2017)</li><li>- <b>Civil and state agent</b> (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000)</li><li>- <b>Street-level bureaucracy</b> and mechanisms affecting LIPWs' <b>discretion</b> (Brodtkin, 2015)</li></ul>	2 3



While the conceptual and theoretical framework applied across the articles encompasses and represent somewhat different theoretical schools, they complimented one another in a very usefully way for this analysis. This will be elaborated in the following section.

### ***Conceptualising young refugees' navigation, capacities to aspire and agency***

As for exploring the young refugees' experiences, I applied Henrik Vigh's concept *Social Navigation*, which offers a framework for understanding how young people navigate to secure themselves a meaningful existence, in a space where their futures were uncertain (Vigh, 2009, 2010). Emerging from his prolonged fieldwork with young urban men in Bissau, Vigh developed the concept *social navigation*, after noticing how the young people were constantly alert to what spaces of possibility would emerge or disappear, what trajectories would become possible, and what goals could be envisioned. For this analysis, the *social navigation* concept offered a useful way of zooming in on the relationship between the young refugees' immediate struggles and their attempts of securing themselves a meaningful existence, in a space where their futures remained uncertain (Vigh, 2009). *Social navigation* incorporates a temporality in the sense that it offers a way of understanding how people in uncertain environments deal with immediate difficulties, whilst simultaneously striving to direct their lives into the future; '*...social navigation entails simultaneously moving toward a distant future location or condition (that is, movement toward future positions and possibilities), and making one's way across immediate and proximate oncoming changes and forces of the near future.*' (Vigh, 2009, p. 429). In that way, the framework related well to the longitudinally approach, exploring the time and context dynamics of how the young refugees experienced their opportunities for taking control in their lives, and moving towards the futures, they themselves wanted to live. As Vigh's conceptual framework recognises, young people act, adjust, and attune their strategies to the unfolding of the environment itself, as well as to the effect this has on arising possibilities to improve their life-chances (Vigh, 2009, 2010). Rather than addressing structural contexts as stable, the social navigation concept embraces an alternative perspective on the intersection between agency and changing structures. This framework was therefore also a useful way of grasping the young refugees' navigation between their immediate struggles to meet the obligations of the integration programme, and their endeavours to secure themselves a meaningful existence, in a context where the rapidly changing political agenda reinforced the uncertainty of their future opportunities. Vigh's framework was however limited in terms of operationalizing more concrete indicators for their navigation and agency.

To operationalize the young refugees' '*social navigation*', I therefore focused on their *capacities to aspire* and their demonstrations of *agency* as indicators for their abilities navigating their lives towards the futures, they themselves wished to live. I applied Appadurai's (2004) conceptualization of aspirations as wants, preferences and choices, as well as practical agentic abilities to take advantage of present possibilities

to better future possibilities. More specifically, I sought to understanding not only how the young refugees envisioned their futures, but also the dynamics of their abilities to envision a future at all, and the implications of their capacities to aspire. Appadurai claims that the capacity to aspire as a cultural and navigational capacity, is not evenly distributed, and states that *'...the better off you are (in terms of power, dignity, and material resources), the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration.'* Appadurai (2004, p. 68). His acknowledgement of how people's horizons of aspirations tend to be associated with their life conditions and opportunities within their reach, provided a useful lens for seeing how the young refugees' aspirations changed over time, and correlated to their current horizons of opportunities. As exemplified through Aleem's case in article 1, his ambitions and horizons of aspirations clearly expanded in line with his educational progress. Hence, besides the immediate constraints entailed in the young refugees' retention in repeated internships', low-income unskilled employment, and limited educational prospects (article 1, Rytter and Ghandchi, 2020), also follows an unequal access to concrete horizons of aspirations for them to pursue. Incorporating the work of Appadurai's work in my analysis, made this clearer.

The concept of *agency* has been widely addressed to explore people's capacities to exercise free choice and act independently of immediate constraints (Jary and Jary, 2005) as well as to discuss young people's abilities to give directions to their lives through reflexive processes, which are socially embedded and influenced by contextual structures (Biasin and Evans, 2019; Evans 2006, 2007, 2009; Evans & Waite, 2013). Taking young refugees' agency into account, is crucial for examining how they are cared for in their host societies, and to understand their aspirations of what they wish to accomplish (Watters, 2012) From the inductive empirical analysis, it was clear that the young refugees' future aspirations, their belief in being able to reach these, and the action they took striving to direct their lives towards these aspirations, changed over time. It was also clear that these changes were closely related to the immediate circumstances they faced, embedded in the rapidly shifting political framework and its increasing focus on repatriation.

Engaging with Jack Barbalet's (1998) work on agency was a useful way for not only describing the young refugees' agentic abilities, but also understanding the underlying mechanisms driving their opportunities and impetus to act. Barbalet's (1998) recognition of *confidence*, as a basic foundation for action, was a valuable way of addressing how the context, as well as their positions in society, not only influenced the young refugees' capacities to aspire, but also their incentives to act on their aspirations. Barbalet's recognition of *confidence* as key to a person's capacity to engage with the unknowable future, complemented relevantly to the premises for people's capacities to aspire, as conceptualized by Appadurai (2004). Hence, if the capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity, nested within the context of opportunities at people's disposition, one's opportunity for upward socio-economic mobility, is heavily context dependent. While this is not surprising, combining these conceptual

frameworks has been a useful way of underpinning the interrelation between the young refugees' capacities to aspire and their capacities to successfully engage in the future. While Appadurai does not disclaim, that people who live in poverty are capable of wishing, wanting, needing, planning, and aspiring, he emphasizes that a part of living in poverty entails diminishing of the circumstances in which these practices occur (Appadurai, 2004). When living in poverty, he claims, the pathways from aspirations to concrete opportunities are likely to be *'more rigid, less supple, and less strategically valuable'* (Appadurai, 2004, p.69). Hence, if the young refugees' life conditions, as well as the concrete opportunities at their disposal, diminish in line with the reinforced uncertainty of their residency, their capacities to aspire are likely to be hampered. Moreover, if their access to education, employment, and full inclusion in society is constraint, it might not only narrow their horizons of opportunities to pursue, but also their sense of acceptance and recognition, which are central to their feeling of confidence in their capacities for successfully engaging the future (Barbalet, 1998). As Barbalet emphasizes: *'Recognition functions to promote social action; it arises in (or is caused by) relations of acceptance and recognition. The actor's confidence is a necessary source of action; without it; action simply could not occur'* (Barbalet, 1998).

In summary, Vigh's conceptual framework (2009, 2010) functioned well to set an overall structure for the analysis on young refugees' navigation between their immediate struggles and their endeavours to secure themselves a meaningful existence within a changing and uncertain context. Moreover, combining Vigh's framework with the work of Appadurai (2004) and Barbalet (1998) respectively, enabled me to engage in a more comprehensive analysis of how the young refugees' capacities to aspire, and incitements for action, were embedded in the context of opportunities available to them.

### ***Street-level bureaucracy and the examination of LIPWs' roles, moral agency, and discretion***

From the empirical analysis, it was noticeable how the LIPWs' understandings of their roles, professional ethics, responsibilities, and their capabilities to support young refugees' full incorporation in society, were challenged over time by the reoccurring political turn towards repatriation. The literature on street-level bureaucracy offered a useful framework for exploring the positions and dilemmas which the LIPWs faced in the frontline, when translating these policies into everyday realities in their encounters with young refugees. Drawing on the work of Bernardo Zacka (2017) was useful for exploring the processual dimensions affecting LIPWs' moral agency, as well as the complex position, and the ethical dilemma they are faced with, when implementing repatriation policies, as discussed in article 2. Stepping back from the moment of the ethical decision-making, and exploring the moral dispositions which LIPWs adopt, (the way they interpret situations, how they moral their sentiments, and how they understand their role and responsibilities) (Zacka, 2017), was a useful

starting point for the analysis. By zooming in on how the LIPWs drew on fundamental ethical principles in their understandings and interpretations of their roles and responsibilities, it became more apparent how implementing the repatriation policies, conflicted with these dispositions. With attention to the arising of *impossible situations*, Zacka moves beyond the individual mechanisms of moral agency. He acknowledges how the organizational environment in which LIPWs work, and the set of normative demands they are exposed to, affect their capacity to operate as moral agents (Zacka, 2017). This acknowledgement of how LIPWs' moral integrity is embedded in the broader structures of their work, was useful for understanding the pressure the LIPWs' faced, as well as their individual responses, when struggling to meet conflicting normative demands.

In article 3, I sought to undertake an in-depth analysis of how LIPWs understood their roles and responsibilities, and how the municipalities' changing implementation practices affected their discretion and opportunities for realizing these. Engaging with Maynard-Moody's and Musheno's (2000) concepts, *citizen agents* and *state agents*, formed a useful starting point for understanding how the LIPWs positioned themselves and navigated the balance of acting in response to the young refugees' needs, within the contextual framework of their legislative obligations. While this was a useful starting point for zooming in on the LIPWs' positioning as civil agents, it was less adequate in explaining the mechanisms affecting their discretion and opportunities for realizing their positions as *civil agents*. In that sense, leaning on the work of Brodtkin (2015), expanded the analysis to examine how the structural context of municipalities' values, organization, and implementation strategies changed over time, and influenced the LIPWs' discretionary power to act as *civil agents*.

Thus, across the conceptual and theoretical frameworks applied in the three articles, the underpinning analytical focal point has been to address how the study participants navigated and experienced their agentic manoeuvre room, in an uncertain and changing context, shaken by the political turn from integration towards repatriation during 2018 to 2020. The centre of analysis has for the young refugees been to explore their capacities to aspire and agentic opportunities to pursue the lives they wished to live, and for the LIPWs it has been to explore the mechanisms affecting their discretionary space to facilitate the support they themselves regarded important, and fulfil the professional roles, which they themselves valued.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1. BRIDGING THE ARTICLES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO EXISTING LITERATURE

#### 5.1.1. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT

One of the key lessons learned from this PhD research is the critical necessity of incorporating social support for newly arrived refugees. The very first period of young refugees' resettlement was broadly depicted among the study participants, as a particularly difficult time. Although this period was filled with sincere hope and relief after being granted residence permit, majority of the young refugees depicted this period as time of confusion, isolation, and loneliness. Uniting the perspectives of the young refugees and the LIPWs respectively, enabled me to see a consensus in their emphasis on social relations, as being the most fundamental resource for the young refugees' coping during the first period of their resettlement. The young refugees referred to social relations as fundamental to distract them from worries, overcome loneliness, cope with traumatic experiences, build language skills, and gain important knowledge of societal laws and norms (article 1). Those young refugees, who had access to social relations, referred to these as their most essential sort of support, to help them cope through hardship. Those with no or limited access to social relations, articulated social relations as their greatest deprivation and appealed for concrete initiatives to help them build social networks. These experiences echo existing literature, finding that refugees' separation from family, friends and social networks cause social isolation and may be harmful to their mental health (Montgomery 2008; Vervliet et al. 2014). Similarly, the LIPWs pointed to young refugees' access to social relations as the most decisive factor for their resettlement, mental well-being, and incorporation in Danish society, and therefore encouraged holistic integration approaches seeking to facilitate social support.

As emphasized in article 1, the young refugees' demonstrated capacities to not only aspire, but also to reorient their future aspirations, and search for new pathways forward, despite their constrained life opportunities. In that sense, the empirical findings point to young refugees' agency and motivation, although often disrupted, nevertheless as an important resource to acknowledge and build on. The deeply social nature of their agency, as also recognized by other scholars (Verdasco, 2020, Eide et al, 2018), underlines the need to strengthening their access to social support. As Verdasco (2020) observed, everyday rituals and social engagement created breaks in the temporality of waiting and uncertainty framing young refugees' lives during asylum: *'In these breaks they had some control over their lives and were able to invest in friendships, consociate relationships or a sense of community and thus gain a temporary sense of certainty'* (Verdasco, 2020 p 570.). Hence, even if young refugees'

residence permits remain temporary, strengthening municipal spaces holding opportunities for them to build trustworthy social relations, and experience some sort of stability under otherwise very uncertain circumstances, is likely to strengthen their coping and agency.

As emphasized in article 2, the LIPWs generally regarded themselves as to work for the inclusion of young refugees, and as categorized by Vitus & Jarlby (2021), they likewise strived to ensure young refugees' *competences, participation, social relations, and well-being*. (Vitus & Jarlby, 2021). Most LIPWs positioned themselves as what Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000) refer to as *civil agents* and advocated for more comprehensive efforts to incorporate social support for young refugees. However, in recent years, as the political priorities have favoured refugees' self-sufficiency, employment, and repatriation (Folketinget, 2019), less political attention has been dedicated to promoting young refugees' psychosocial well-being. Efforts to go beyond these politically driven primary objectives, and incorporate social support, was actualised locally from efforts within the municipalities. The incorporation of social support was most prominent in municipality A, arising from values, priorities, and resources in the municipality' integration department, from collaboration with civil society and NGOs, as well as from the extraordinary efforts of the LIPWs' in the frontline of policy implementation (Article 3).

Uniting the experiences of young refugees and LIPWs respectively, allowed an examination of how LIPWs' accounts of the municipalities' implementation efforts, correlated with the experiences and realities of the young refugees. For instance, the local efforts to ensure social support for young refugees, as actualized in municipality A during 2018, (article 3), resonated with what the young refugees across the two municipalities pointed to as important (article 1). Genuine and trustworthy relationships between young refugees and LIPWs were by both groups of study participants reported as important. Initiatives to facilitate social encounters between young refugees and ethnic Danish peers, through volunteers and NGOs, were likewise reported as valuable by most study participants. Having concrete places of affiliations, (e.g., at the temporary housing facilities) were also broadly mentioned as valuable social meeting points for the young refugees, civil society, NGOs and LIPWs. Accordingly, across the empirical data in both municipalities, there was a consensus among the young refugees and the LIPWs of the fundamental importance of social relations, as well as around the valuable role of the municipalities' integration teams in helping to facilitate social support for the young refugees. However, as discussed in article 3, the LIPWs' opportunities for realizing their becoming as *civil agents* and incorporating social support in their implementation efforts, varied between the two municipalities, and changed over time.

In a previous study, Belabas and Gerrits (2017) found that street-level bureaucrats transcended their discretionary power to meet the needs of clients. Several LIPWs in this study likewise reported on situations where they had transcended their

discretionary power and gone beyond the time and content allocated to their job positions to meet evolving needs of young refugees (article 2). However, this research also found that the mechanisms of LIPWs' discretionary power to act as *civil agents*, were closely embedded in the broader structures of changing policies and municipality implementation practices (article 3). Structural conditions such as the organization of the integration department, the numbers of LIPWs employed in the integration department, the managerial values and priorities, and collaborations with external networks of support (NGOs and civil society) played a significant role for the LIPWs' opportunities for responding to young refugees' psychosocial needs in their implementation practices. However, these structural mechanisms changed over time as the municipalities adapted to changing numbers of arriving refugees and the reinforced focus on repatriation, and consequently affected the LIPWs' discretion and opportunities for acting as *civil agents*. Their opportunities to incorporate social support diminished in line with the municipalities' adaptations to the lower numbers of refugees arriving and the political turn towards repatriation. As acknowledged by Brodtkin (2015), the LIPWs' did what they *could* do, within the organizational, structural, and managerial context of their work.

### 5.1.2. REPATRIATION AND ITS TEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

Across the articles included in this PhD thesis, the salience temporality of the study participants' experiences, have come to be a central theme. The political turn from integration towards repatriation profoundly manifested in the young refugees' resettlement experiences (article 1), it challenged the LIPWs' professional roles and ethical principles (article 2) and impacted on the municipalities' implementation practices (article 3). Accordingly, this PhD research contributes to the field of recent studies unpacking how the complex temporalities in contemporary asylum and integration policies shape migration experiences and implementation practices (Barber & Lem, 2018; Brekke, 2004; Jacobsen et al, 2020; Mavroudi et al., 2017; Vitus, 2010;). As already accounted for, an extensive body of the existing literature has found that the psychological pressure living in uncertainty during the asylum period impact negatively on young refugees' mental health, which may have long term behavioural, psychological, and cognitive consequences (Bean et al., 2007; Brekke, 2004; Fazel et al., 2012; Vitus & Nielsen, 2011) and hamper their resilience (Sleijpen et al., 2017;). In this research, I found that the repatriation law had prolonged similar mechanisms of temporality into the resettlement period, which retained the young refugees in uncertainty and permeated most their experiences. As set out in article 1, it hampered their capacities to aspire and opportunities for long-term planning. It noticeably impacted on their psychological well-being. Some reported they had struggle sleeping, several felt anxious. For others, it made them feel unwelcomed and insecure to an extent that made them reluctant to approach ethnic Danish peers out of fear of being rejected. For most study participants, it impeded their concentration and motivation to engage in their education and internships, while two of these study participants dropped out of their education. As Barbalet (1998) stresses, for a person

to be motivated for engagement, that person must find meaning and prospects in the given activities. Hence, the persistent uncertainty and lack of prospects to stay in Denmark considerably hampered their engagement in social and educational activities. This is problematic since previous studies have found that postmigration factors, such as social support and access to education, are influential for young refugees' incorporation in society, mental health-, and long-term employment outcomes (Montgomery et al, 2022; Borsch et al, 2019a). Additionally, as Borsch and colleagues (2019) recently found, supportive school settings can be important arenas for strengthening young refugees' social capital. Therefore, when fear and uncertainty hamper the young refugees' engagement in social and educational activities, it may reach beyond its immediate implications, and cause long-term consequences.

Over time, some of the young refugees managed to navigate through confining obstacles and demonstrated agentic abilities moving their lives towards somewhat better positions. Over time, most managed to build friendships, although their social relations with ethnically Danish peers remained sparse. Those who had dropped out of education in 2019, returned to their studies in 2020. This could to some extent reflect what other studies have found, that refugees' resilience strengthens over time. As Eide and colleagues (2018) discovered, over time, unaccompanied minors strengthened their capacity to develop more trustworthy relations, to act independently and to make sense of their environment (Eide 2018). Other studies have found that newly arrived refugees' mental health improves over time (Montgomery et al, 2022; Montgomery, 2011). Montgomery (2010) discovered that, while many young refugees showed high levels of psychological problems at arrival in Denmark, for most of them, these had decreased after 8–9 years. Thus, from the existing literature we know, that young refugees' agency, well-being, and resilience have the potential to strengthen over time. However, we also know, that such improvements are highly influenced by post-migration factors, such as access to social relations and education (Bjorkenstam et al, 2020; Borsch et al, 2019a). Also, most of the literature, which finds young refugees' resilience improving over time, rests on premises, that their being in the host societies have more permanent prospects.

Contributing to this literature, this PhD research adds profound insights into the resettlement experiences of young refugees' when the foundation for their residence permits remains uncertain. The shorter intervals for reapplication for residence permits, and the persistent possibility of deportation, continued to affect the study participants' experiences in 2020. Every time they had to apply for extending their residence permits, or when the political and media attention on refugees' potential deportation increased, it once again reinforced their feelings of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. It continued to hamper their possibilities for making any long-term planning for their future. While two of the study participants had gained ordinary employment in 2020, this was manual labour at a minimum wage, while several of the remaining study participants were still involved in multiple internships. Thus, although the young refugees in this study demonstrated agentic abilities, they were



arguably merely precariously included in Danish society. This study therefore supports Rytter's and Ghandchi's observation that uncertainty has for refugees extended beyond the fences of the asylum centre and into their everyday lives, as they are to *'live and work in internships or job-training schemes, protected temporarily by the status of being a refugee—but they never know how long this will last, or whether their residence permit will be extended or not.'* (Rytter and Ghandchi, 2018, p. 198).

Together with colleagues, I have previously called for attention to the structural constraints on children's agency as well as to the at times negative outcomes of many of the apparently agentic choices available to children (Campbell et al, 2015). Similar considerations are relevant regarding the conditions of the young refugees' agency in this study. Although the study participants over time demonstrated capacities to aspire and agentic abilities, these were still bounded by the opportunities within their reach. At times, their apparently agentic choices, were choices between two negative outcomes as exemplified in article 1: as Hamid's choice between living isolated in a remote area, feeling stressed by a pressure from the municipality to find a job, which he was unable to find, or liberating himself from the integration programme and living on the streets of Copenhagen, without integration benefits, to find employment and friendships. In Mohammed's case, he faced the choice between skipping his language class to help his pregnant wife, meaning his economic integration benefit would be withdrawn, or to follow the required language programme and maintain his full economic benefits, without helping his wife. Thus, while this PhD research recognized the young refugees' capacities to aspire and agentic abilities, these were somewhat bound and disrupted by the continuous temporal and precarious conditions of their being in society. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualize agency as temporally embedded processes, that can only be captured in its full complexity if it is analytically situated within the flow of time. This acknowledgement of, and attention to, the temporal flows of agency, usefully grasps the young refugees' agency within the temporary conditions of their being in Danish society. Their capacities to aspire, agentic abilities, and engagement in society was somewhat bounded within the time frame of the length of their residency. In agreement with Fernandes (2015), this study showed that while young refugees are expected to engage actively in society, contribute economically and socially, as well as display agency by taking up opportunities, the context in which they unfolded their lives, reduced this very agency. As previous stated, the repatriation law articulates that repatriation effort must be seen in connection with the integration efforts (Retsinformation.dk, 2019). However, another key lesson learned from this study is that while repatriation efforts are officially encouraged to be seen in connection with integration efforts, the realities of connecting integration and repatriation efforts, are much more problematic.

Resonating with the young refugees' experiences, the LIPWs likewise regarded the repatriation efforts as counterproductive for the integration efforts. As discussed in article 2, the LIPWs found themselves in a complex position, when having to work for the young refugees' inclusion and engagement in Danish society, while

simultaneously discussing their repatriation. Emotional reactions, the fear of deportation and the lack of the prospect for permanent residency, were reported by LIPWs as barriers for their abilities to encourage the young refugees' engagement in Danish society. Furthermore, discussing repatriation challenged the LIPWs' ethical principles and contradicted their professional self-perceptions as social workers, who ought to work for the inclusion, participation, liberation, and well-being of refugees (article 2).

Young refugees' opportunities to engage in society certainly increase, once they obtain temporary residency, as compared to while applying for asylum. However, this PhD research found that the uncertain and ambiguous mechanisms, which for long have been known to influence the asylum period, have now expanded into the resettlement period. Exploring the uncertainty and ambiguity of asylum-seekers' waiting experiences, Brekke (2004) found considerable consequences for the asylum-seekers, as well as for the authorities involved having to simultaneously handling preparations for integration and return. The possibility for return, he argues, influenced the motivation and access to integration, while integration in turn, has effect on the potential success of a return operation (Brekke, 2004). When granted temporary residence permit, refugees are expected to actively engage in and contribute to society. However, as argued in this thesis, the prolonged mechanisms of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the foundation for the young refugees being in society, considerably undermined their opportunities to realise these expectations.

## **5.2. NEW WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG REFUGEES' TEMPORARY RESETTLEMENT?**

This PhD thesis has offered empirical insights into the experiences of young refugees and LIPWs, caught in the midst of the policy turn from integration towards repatriation. The temporary implications of this policy turn have fundamentally shaped the life conditions for young refugees in Denmark and changed the conditions for those in the frontline, working for their incorporation in society. Although the process of policy tightening began prior to the young refugees' arrival in the municipalities, upon arrival, they clearly expected that were about to resettle permanently in Denmark. Similarly, during the first interview round in 2018, the LIPWs' experiences clearly reflected similar expectations, that they were to support the long-term resettlement of young refugees. However, the reality is, that when young refugees are granted temporary residency, their resettlement no longer have permanent prospects. Arising from these empirical insights, this PhD thesis calls for new ways of understanding and supporting young refugees' resettlement.

The first period of resettlement is already known as a distinct period in young refugees' lives as their experiences during this transition period, may influence how vulnerabilities and resourcefulness manifest in their lives in the years to come (Eide et al, 2018). As discussed in the articles, social support and long-term investments in

education were broadly recognized by the study participants as key to young refugees' resettlement, well-being and opportunities moving towards their aspired futures. Looking at the existing body of literature, psychosocial support (Fazel, 2018), and education (Montgomery et al, 2022) is known to have long term positive outcomes for refugees. However, despite being broadly valued among the young refugees (article 1) and the LIPWs (article 3), as well as well-documented positive long-term effects, these efforts were significantly reduced in 2020. This may be reasonably explained by the necessity for adapting resources to the lower numbers of arriving refugees, since the declining number of refugees have reduced the state reimbursement for many municipalities, resulting in reductions of manpower in many integration teams (Jakobsen et al, 2021). Furthermore, as argued in article 3, municipalities may also be reluctant to make the same level of long-term investments to ensure refugees' full incorporation in society, if their prospects for a future in Denmark remain uncertain. As comprehensive social support and education requires long-term financial investments, and are not politically encouraged, it becomes more challenging for municipalities to implement these in practice.

Denmark's long recognition of its universal welfare model, resting on key values such as community, solidarity, and equality, with generous rights for all (Guldager and Skytte, 2013), deviates from the recent tendencies in newly arrived refugees' precarious inclusion in society. The persistent focus on refugees' self-sufficiency and employment, arguably reflects neoliberal values emphasizing the duty and responsibility of the individual refugees (Rytter and Ghandchi, 2021; Pedersen 2011). However, such commitments might be difficult to achieve without adequate access to social support and engagement in education, which are known as key drivers for their upward socio-economic mobility (Fazel et al, 2012; Montgomery et al, 2022). As demonstrated throughout this thesis, and supported by existing literature, young refugees' access to social relations and education, are highly correlated to their mental health as well as to their engagement and incorporation in society. An arising concern is whether young refugees' successful undergoing of critical recuperating processes and fundamental transitions into adulthood may be undermined by their incessant life conditions in temporality and insecurity. Poor mental health during young people's transition to adulthood is known to be associated with long-lasting socioeconomic and health inequalities (Elder et al, 2016; Montgomery, 2022; Shanahan). The emerging question is: do host societies carry the same responsibility for ensuring optimal conditions supporting young refugees' full incorporation in society and successful transitions into adulthood, even if they are not to stay permanently?

### **5.3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings from this thesis call for further research to explore the long-term implications for young refugees' retainment in prolonged uncertainty during their

resettlement. Furthermore, as will be explained below, the current efforts to support Ukrainian refugees' incorporation in Danish society, contrasts the realities and conditions for the young refugees participating in this study. It would therefore be of high relevance to undertake an equivalent qualitative longitudinal study with young Ukrainian refugees and LIPWs in the present context, to explore the implications, lived experiences, and long-term outcomes of the respective approaches.

## **AFTERWORD**

Meanwhile writing the final chapters of this PhD thesis, the tragic circumstances in Ukraine have simultaneously caused the numbers of refugees seeking asylum in Denmark, to increase markedly in recent weeks. This has evoked remarkable comprehensive efforts from the Danish politicians, NGOs, companies, and civil society, to mobilise extensive support, to ensure the best possible conditions for their reception and incorporation in society. Many of these initiatives address the very same

areas that have been raised in this thesis, as well as in the existing literature: short process time for asylum, extensive involvement of civil society, close collaboration between municipalities NGOs and civil society, focus on salary-based ordinary employment rather than multiple internships, engagements of interpreters etc. While the full effects of these new initiatives have not yet been documented in the literature, they are highly welcomed, appreciated and important. They do, nonetheless, sharply contrasts the realities and conditions for the young refugees covered in this study. This leads to a final matter, which I find inevitable not to address: The decisions and conditions of who and of how many are to be granted residence permit, as well as the duration of their residencies, are politically determined and effectuated by the Danish Immigration Service. Some of the recent aforementioned differences have been justified politically, as well as publicly, by geographical affiliations with Ukraine. However, if the comprehensive initiatives, which are now unfolding to support Ukrainian refugees, were expanded to embrace all residing refugees, regardless of their original geographic affiliations, it could potentially strengthen their well-being, mental health, long-term outcomes and full incorporation in society.

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