

## Female Migrants' Experiences of Labour Market 'Integration' in Denmark

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# Chapter 2

## Female Migrants' Experiences of Labour Market 'Integration' in Denmark



Michelle Pace and Katrine Sofie Bruun Bennetzen

### 2.1 Introduction

Denmark's Aliens Act, passed by the Danish Parliament (Folketinget) in 1983, was regarded as one of Europe's most liberal. This was at a time when Denmark experienced an influx of refugees from Turkey and Pakistan as well as former Yugoslavia due to ongoing wars and civil conflict. Family reunification had been introduced a decade earlier, in a context where Denmark was considered one of the most ethnically homogeneous societies in the world (Gundelach, 2001).

However, the Aliens Act has been continuously amended. From June 2015 to June 2019, when Inger Støjberg was Minister of Immigration, Integration and Housing, it was modified more than 100 times (Bendixen, 2019a). A key factor in the number of restrictions introduced to this Act since the 1980s has been the influence of the Progress Party<sup>1</sup> (Fremskridtspartiet) and, subsequently, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti), which have dominated political narratives and public debates on 'integration problems' in Danish society, particularly with regard to 'non-Western immigrants'. In his opening address to Parliament on 6 October 2015, then-prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen announced a new integration

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<sup>1</sup>The Progress Party first entered Parliament after the 1973 'Landslide Election'. It immediately emerged as the second largest party in Denmark. But the party gradually lost voter support and eventually also its representation in Parliament after some of its leading members left to establish the Danish People's Party in 1995.

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policy wherein the focus would be on ensuring that refugees found employment immediately after being granted asylum in Denmark.

Characterising the high levels of unemployment among ‘non-Western immigrants’ as indicative of the failure of existing integration policies, Rasmussen declared this new policy focus to be aimed at refugees arriving in Denmark in the wake of the European ‘refugee crisis’. The underlying assumption was that it was through employment that refugees would be socially, culturally, and economically integrated into Danish society. Female migrants were specifically targeted as in need of labour market integration: ‘It is absolutely crucial that we get more non-Western women working. Employment amongst refugees and immigrants is improving in general, but women are still some way behind – including those that have been in the country for many years’, Inger Støjberg (Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2018) iterated: ‘That means that many of those women are without work and knowledge of the norms and values of Danish society, and are in practice isolated from Danish society’.

This ‘work first’ strategy and ensuing political narratives generally contributed to a polarised environment in public debates. In light of these developments, this chapter focuses on female migrants’ efforts at integrating into the Danish labour market. Numerous studies have demonstrated how the experience of integration is gendered and often to the detriment of women (Canning, 2016; Freedman, 2008; Spijkerboer, 2018). Recent reports by the Danish Refugee Council (2019, 2020a, b) similarly suggest that female refugees are particularly disadvantaged within the Danish integration regime; they generally experience limited legal rights, limited access to paid employment, pressure to undertake unpaid care work, obstacles to learning the Danish language and to building a social network, as well as poverty due to the limited ‘integration benefit’ (*integrationsydelse*).

We therefore seek to investigate whether the experiences of female migrants reveal the foundational nature and logics of Denmark’s integration regime and to explore the coping strategies of these same refugees in their encounter with said regime. Empirically, the chapter focuses on the biographical accounts of eight female migrants in Denmark and their experiences of labour market integration (LMI). In the migrant-integration regime nexus, two types of navigation strategies emerge based on (prior) experiences, motivations, and resources. We will elaborate on these through personal narratives that reveal how female migrants strive to transform their host society and make it habitable. While these narratives refer to both fragmentation and a lack of presence, they are also stories of hope, resilience, and perseverance.

The chapter is structured as follows: the first section provides a background of recently arrived immigrants in Denmark. It also serves as a profile review of these recent arrivals and which barriers they faced to enter the Danish labour market. We then explain how a biographical perspective helps us delve deeper into the experiences of eight female migrants and how it allows us to nuance their gendered experience of the Danish labour market. Then, in the methodology section, we provide details of how these biographical interviews were conducted and analysed. The next section serves to outline the themes that emerge from these eight

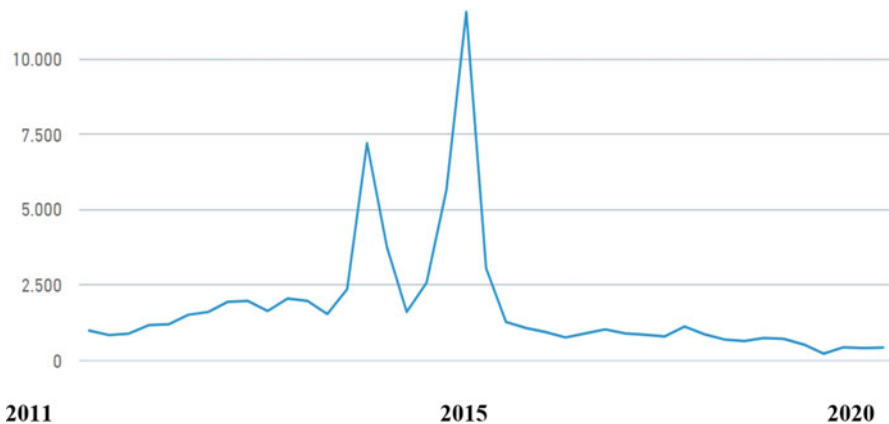
biographical accounts, which draw upon both instrumental and emotional factors shaping the 'integration' (re)routes of our female narrators as well as associated generative or withdrawing epiphanies provoked by turning points. We thus seek to highlight turning points in the integration (re)routes of our female narrators while outlining the epiphanic moments presented in their narrations – whether generative or withdrawing realisations. The fifth section offers a typology of the actors and factors that trigger epiphanic moments in the life trajectories of our interviewees. We conclude with a summary of our key findings.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Contemporary Patterns of Migration in Denmark

This section provides a background of contemporary patterns of migration to Denmark to foreground eight biographical narratives of migrant women's experiences. The aim is to highlight their compounded stories of hope and resilience in the wake of their resettlement and what added value such an approach gives to the extant debates.

### 2.2.1 The Scope of Migration to Denmark

As visualised in Fig. 2.1 (showing number of asylum applicants per quarter of a year), the number of asylum applicants peaked in 2015 during which more than



**Fig. 2.1** Number of Asylum Applicants. (Source: Danmarks Statistik)

<sup>2</sup>The authors wish to thank former SIRIUS H2020 project Danish team members Liv Bjerre and Somdeep Sen for their work on the project's Work Package 6 and the ensuing report. This present chapter builds on this earlier work.

**Table 2.1** Residency Permits Issued by Category, 2015

Category of Residency	2015	Percentage 2015
Work permits for EU/EEA citizens	37,366	44
Study permits	12,658	15
Family reunification/ spousal visa	12,138	14
Work permits for non-EU/EEA citizens	11,682	14
Asylum Grants	10,849	13
<b>In Total</b>	<b>84,693</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: ‘Tal og fakta på udlændingeområdet, 2015’, *Udlændingestyrelsen* (Figures and facts in the area of foreigners, 2015, The Danish Immigration Service)

21,000 people sought protection in Denmark (Dansk Statistik, 2020). During this period, asylum seekers were mostly Syrians, Iranians, Afghans, Iraqis, or stateless peoples fleeing war, conflict, and persecution, hence with a strong claim for asylum (Bendixen, 2020a).

The number of refugees *granted* asylum also reached a peak in 2015 similar to the overall number of new Danish residency permits. A residency permit is typically granted for a temporary time period and can be renewed; for instance, work or study permits, spousal visas, family reunification, or asylum grants (Table 2.1).

As shown in Table 2.1, most applicants were EU/EEA citizens who were granted a residency permit on the basis of employment. The second largest group in this category were students attending Danish study programmes, followed by people granted residency based on family reunification or a spousal visa, followed by non-European citizens coming to Denmark for a job offer. The smallest group were asylum claimants granted refugee status (Dansk Statistik, 2020).

This order and hierarchy in the distribution of residency permits has been roughly maintained since 2015, with the lowest number of residencies granted to refugees between 2015–2020 (ibid.). Since 2016, the numbers of registered asylum-seekers have been decreasing every year and reached a historic low in 2020–2021 (Dansk Statistik, 2020; Bendixen, 2020a). Border closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic brought new arrivals to a near halt in 2020 with a total of 1.515 Danish asylum applications, while the number had risen to 2095 in 2021 (Bendixen, 2020a; UIM, 2022). From January until mid-May 2022, 2,700 asylum applicants have been registered, while 1,983 of them are Ukrainian refugees (Bendixen, 2022; UIM, 2022).

### 2.2.2 Contemporary Asylum Governance

European border externalisation, as well as restricted asylum and immigration policies, were the apparent reasons for the continuing decrease in the number of asylum claimants *and* asylum claimants granted residencies between 2015 and 2019 in Denmark before the COVID-19 pandemic led to an immediate border closure in

2020 (Bendixen, 2020a; Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2017). Although these are general trends within the EU, the Danish case is a particular one with regard to its asylum and immigration governance policies: Denmark has traditionally been known as a liberal frontrunner for refugee protection, while Danish immigration policies have become some of the most restrictive policies in all of the EU within the past five to seven years (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2017). At the height of the 'refugee crisis', Denmark was known amongst refugees as the host country where asylum applications were speedily processed in a matter of six months and where accommodation was provided (Pace, 2017). Once word of mouth started to spread from successful applicants to aspiring ones, namely Syrians, steps were taken by the Danish government to tighten the asylum system (ibid.). In response to the surge in the numbers of those seeking asylum over the summer of 2015, Denmark ran an anti-refugee ad campaign in Arabic-language newspapers warning refugees against going to Denmark (ibid.). These and similar restrictive measures placed Denmark in the international spotlight.

In 2015 then-prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen suggested that international conventions on refugee protection should be adjusted, to control the unprecedented influx of asylum seekers to Europe. The Danish government further announced its intention to investigate the possibility of limiting the influence of the European Court of Human Rights during Denmark's presidency of the Council of Europe in 2017, not least with regard to matters of immigration (ibid.). In 2016, Denmark drew further international attention for allowing the police to search asylum seekers and seize their assets, and for passing a bill restricting refugees' access to family reunification for up to three years (ibid; Pace, 2017). Moreover, debate ensued on how deportation centres are part of the formalised asylum architecture in Denmark. In 2019, Denmark was severely criticised by the Council of Europe's Anti-Torture Committee for alleged 'inhumane' conditions at Danish Immigration Detention Centers – Nykøbing Falster and Ellebæk – as well as for being the first country to take steps to repatriate Syrian nationals by revoking their residency permits, although all cases have undergone legal appeal (Canning, 2019; Bendixen, 2020b; CPT, 2020). That same year, Denmark again drew international media attention for implementing an incentive programme urging refugees, namely Syrians from Damascus, to return (Bojesen, 2019). The Danish Refugee Councils' head of asylum, Eva Singer, said that many refugees found it too difficult to enter the Danish labour market and become established (quoted in Bojesen, 2019). During the first ten months of 2019, 438 refugees and migrants left Denmark based on said incentive programme, which includes a payment from the state and the option for asylum seekers to change their mind within a year. Thus, Danish residencies are not immediately lost upon return to the home country. According to the DRC, this additional clause encouraged people to return home (Bojesen, 2019). Nonetheless, the UNHCR deems returning to Damascus 'unsafe', and there have been reports of deaths and disappearances in the case of returned Syrians (Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 2020; The New Arab, 2018). Lastly, during the period 2017–2022, Denmark has not been receiving its annual quota of 500 refugees set by the UN resettlement system (Bendixen, 2020a; Bendixen, 2022). Prior to 2017, and since 1978, Denmark had received 500 refugees a year – selected by

the UN – for resettlement (Lauritzen, 2020). The programme is separate from, and in addition to, the EU's efforts to distribute refugees among member states. The former Danish government said its decision to no longer honour its obligation in line with the UN's quota system was the 'burden' of integrating the refugees that had already arrived (Mass, 2017). Denmark also requested a more flexible quota regime, where member states are not obliged to take a certain number of refugees every year (ibid.). The same line is followed by the current government, which did begin to take quota refugees in 2020, although nowhere near 500 a year (Lauritzen, 2020; MS Actionaid, 2020). By comparison, and as of 2018, when Denmark did not receive any quota refugees, Sweden received 4900, while Norway received 2719 quota refugees (UNHCR, 2020).

### ***2.2.3 The Main Routes to Europe and the Struggle of Reaching Scandinavia***

For people from states officially recognised as conflict zones, such as Syria, Eritrea, or Afghanistan, it is usually not possible to enter European territory legally. Thus, the majority of people claiming asylum in Denmark must cross borders illegally. This often implies obtaining forged identity papers, and in many cases, travelling with a human smuggler who knows how to get people across national borders (Bendixen, 2020a). Although a large number of migrants continue arriving in Europe via the sea route from Turkey to Greece, most follow the Libyan route (ibid.). Travelling through Libya and the Sahara desert is an even more dangerous route, where many lose their lives on the way. Political instability in Libya has led European actors to cooperate with Libyan militias on border control and containment of migrants to prevent them from crossing the Mediterranean (Bendixen, 2020a). This has made the situation for migrants travelling through Libya even more dangerous, thus many seek to travel via less familiar routes, such as from Egypt or Tunisia to Italy (ibid.). Nonetheless, the journey is far from over when reaching European borderlands; in Greece or Italy, migrants have a hard time surviving. Fences have been installed, while surveillance and extensive border control units are part of the scene at all national borders within the EU, which makes it extremely difficult to reach Scandinavia (ibid.). Thousands of migrants are stuck on the Greek island of Lesbos or in Bosnia, where the conditions of newly-arrived migrants are reportedly inhumane (ReliefWeb, 2020). Meanwhile, a significant number of women are exposed to sexual assault or rape along their journey to reach Europe (WHO, 2016). Interview materials collated by SIRIUS Danish team members (2018–2020) suggest that most migrants who manage to reach Denmark arrive via boat journeys travelling through Lebanon and continuing onward across Turkish, Greek, North Macedonian, and German borders. Many asylum claimants arriving in Denmark aim to use Denmark as a transit country to reach Sweden or Germany as most-desired host societies (Bendixen, 2020a). However, many do not reach their final desired destination and are forced to remain in Denmark if their fingerprints

have been taken during registration (as stipulated by the Dublin regulation). (ibid.). Thus, the journey to receiving societies can cause significant trauma. Findings from our research have been reiterated by the UK charity, Syria Relief, which estimates that approximately 75 percent of Syrians show Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, while international organisations such as the UNHCR, World Health Organisation, Doctors of the World, and the European Psychiatric Association express concern that migrants, namely refugees, are not obtaining the necessary psychological treatment and are commonly suffering from anxiety, depression, and psychotic disorders (Syria Relief, 2021; The Guardian 2016). The UNHCR underlines how mental health disorders can create long-term barriers to integration into host societies and that much of the emotional suffering of resettled migrants is also directly related to stresses of the present and concerns for the future (Bailey, 2016; UNHCR, 2007).

### 2.3 Informants, Methodological Reflections and Trajectories

With the above background in mind, data for this chapter was collected through semi-structured interviews and conversations with eight female migrants: Five from west Asia/Arab region – namely Habiba, Shokouh, Aisha, Aida, and Dana – and three from south Asia – Alina, Shirisha, and Amala. To protect the identity of our interviewees, we use these pseudonyms throughout.<sup>3</sup>

Of these, five arrived before 2014 (Shokouh, Habiba, Dana, Aida, and Amala), while one arrived in 2014 (Aisha) at the height of the so-called refugee crisis, and two arrived after 2014 (Alina and Shirisha).

Habiba came to Denmark in 2008 on a family reunification visa. Following her divorce settlement, she now holds a temporary residency permit since she has children in Denmark.<sup>4</sup> She wishes to apply for permanent residency as soon as she is eligible. Shokouh arrived in Denmark with her four children for the first time in 1998 on a family reunification visa based on her ex-husband's asylum status. In 2004, the family (except for the oldest son) returned to their country of origin. In 2010, she returned to Denmark with her children. Before leaving Denmark (in 2004) she had obtained a Sect. 7.1 refugee convention status and was later granted

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<sup>3</sup>The authors conducted multiple rounds of interviews with Shokouh (Michelle), Habiba (Michelle) and Aisha (Katrine and Michelle), from which we draw direct quotations. However, we also incorporate material collated by Liv Bjerre (former member of the SIRIUS Danish team) to ensure richness in terms of the saturation of our biographic data. In total, we estimate that, collectively, these members of the SIRIUS Danish team spent approximately 30 hours with these informants. This enables us to create a composite biography of our eight informants as the overall narrative framing this chapter.

<sup>4</sup>Residency permits are, in principle, meant to provide temporary protection, with the exception of permanent residency.



permanent residency. Shokouh recently obtained a Danish passport. Aida has temporary protection (Sect. 7.3) refugee status, which is easily revoked, and granted on the basis of the general situation in the country of origin. Aisha has been granted asylum under a Sect. 7.1 refugee convention status which accounts for individual persecution and is difficult to revoke. She too seeks to apply for permanent residency. Dana is family reunified, while Amala and Shirisaha hold spousal visas, since their husbands are employed in Denmark. Alina holds a student visa.

Aisha has secured gainful employment that matches her skills and qualifications and is thus considered a ‘success’ story. The other seven informants have been unable to find full time employment that matches their skills, experience, and qualifications and who, as a result, were compelled to take on unrelated (and often, low-skilled) jobs or adult education. These informants shed light on similar but also varied life conditions and career trajectories, which reflect their lived experiences of integration in the Danish labour market.

Recruitment of our eight interlocutors occurred primarily through personal contacts and ‘snowball sampling’. As is often the case with these recruitment methods, contact was first made via acquaintances – in our case of the Danish team leader (for Habiba, Shokouh, Aisha, Amala, Alina, and Shirisha). Other acquaintances provided the contact information for Aida and Dana. For the purposes of this chapter, these gatekeepers were critical in facilitating recruitment in the field.

Interviews conducted for this chapter were primarily aimed at gaining a better understanding of female migrants’ own perceptions of their LMI needs, the challenges they faced along the way, and any opportunities that enabled them to find a job in Denmark. Interviewees were then asked to share with the interviewer their hopes, expectations, and plans regarding their life in Denmark. During these interviews, respondents were asked to identify critical events, turning points, and epiphanies that shaped their lived experiences of LMI (or lack thereof) in Denmark. A narrative approach to interviewing was adopted, given that the information we were seeking to collate required that our interlocutors felt safe enough to disclose personal information and discuss sensitive topics pertaining to their lived experiences and related feelings and interpretations. Therefore, an open style of interviewing was the key frame, which allowed our interviewees to narrate their life stories (in their preferred language of either Danish or English since the interviewers were versed in neither Arabic nor Pashto nor Dari) in a semi-structured, but relatively open way. Narratives, in this context, are a wealth in terms of acting as carriers of meaning that our interviewees give to their life trajectories – from leaving their homeland to finding a job in Denmark or having to take alternative life paths because they fail to secure a job that reflects their skills and experiences. These narratives thus come from people with strong emotions who are trying to make sense of their new world in the host society and, in the process, create that world. It is this creation that we seek to unfold here through a compounded narrative of our interviewees’ biographies.

Habiba and Shokouh had several conversations with the Danish team lead partner. They were also interviewed later by Liv Bjerre in their respective homes during the Covid-19 lockdown. Interviewees and interviewers followed the distancing guidelines and sat about five meters apart. Since both the Danish lead partner

(originally from Malta) and the former team member (a 'native' Dane) were female interviewers interviewing female migrants, we observe that our interlocutors narrated their biographies in very similar ways to each interviewer. One may therefore ponder, at this stage, as to whether our interviewees may have related their life accounts differently had one of the interviewers been a male colleague. Moreover, the fact that the former team member could be considered as 'an insider of the host community', the interview data gathered was no different from the data collected by the Danish team lead partner who may be considered an outsider to the host community herself, in similar ways as our interviewees (Irgil, 2020). In fact, we may expect that an outsider-outsider dialogue may trigger different responses to our research questions when compared to an insider-outsider conversation – but this was not the case in these instances (*ibid.*).

Supplementary interviews with Aisha were conducted by team member, Katrine Bennetzen – also a female 'native' Dane. Aisha's integration biography relies mostly on information provided during this final interview. Former team member Liv Bjerre interviewed our other five informants.<sup>5</sup> Trust and mutuality were easily established between the interviewer and the interviewee. Hence, we conclude that interviewees felt equally at ease with all team members, and this reflects on the time taken by the interviewers to ensure that the environment and setting of the interviews were the most comfortable for the interviewees.

All eight interviews were recorded after the appropriate consent was received. For Dana, Aida, Amala, Alina, and Shirisha short companion notes were prepared; longer notes were kept for Habiba, Shokouh, and Aisha. Ethically it was deemed appropriate to allow each interviewee to guide the interviewer through her life journey, from the moment she left her homeland, to the point of arrival in Denmark. In each case, the interviewer took note of threshold moments, turning points, and epiphanies in the life trajectory of the interviewee, particularly moments that transformed the particular life path that interviewees intended to follow once they were in Denmark. Note was also taken of specific challenges faced by interviewees as they were narrated by each. Table 2.2 sums up the overall profile of each of our interviewees.

## 2.4 Biographies of Integration: Turning Points and Epiphanies in the Narratives of Female Migrants in Denmark

The narratives presented in this section draw upon the experiences of our eight informants following their arrival in Denmark as refugees, family reunified, or on a spousal or student visa. Their experiences are framed according to turning points in their lives that triggered epiphanies.

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<sup>5</sup>Liv Bjerre took up a position at Aarhus University (AU) and informed the lead partner that she could not co-author this chapter due to her new responsibilities at AU.

**Table 2.2** Profiles of Interviewees

Interviewee pseudonym	Age (decade range: 20–29, 30–39, etc.)	Education level	Area of origin	Years at destination	Profession at origin	Profession at destination
Habiba	30–39	BA from home country. Currently obtaining a BA in Denmark	West Asia/ Arab region	12	Working in her field of competency at origin	Adult education; assistant position; currently studying
Shokouh	50–59	BA from country of origin; 1 year education obtained in Denmark.	West Asia	17 years	Working in her field of competency at origin	Translation and social work (freelance); periods of unemployment; supplementary work in the service sector
Aisha	40–49	MA from country of origin. Screen writing/ creative writing	West Asia/ Arab region	6 years	Journalist	Media adviser
Dana	50–59	MA from country of origin	West Asia	19 years	Experience in the health sector for two years, while studying, and before arriving in Denmark	Currently unemployed; previously short-term positions; studies related to public health.
Aida	50–59	BA from country of origin	West Asia/ Arab region	8 years	30 years experience in her field of competency at origin	Work in the service sector; hopes to become self-employed
Amala	30–39	BA from country of origin	South Asia	8 years	Amala was a student before arriving in Denmark	Adult education; assistant position; low-skilled jobs in service sector
Alina	20–29	BA from country of origin	South Asia	6 years	Experience working in the airline industry at origin	Completing MA in Denmark; part time low-skilled jobs in service sector

(continued)

**Table 2.2** (continued)

Interviewee pseudonym	Age (decade range: 20–29, 30–39, etc.)	Education level	Area of origin	Years at destination	Profession at origin	Profession at destination
Shirisha	20–29	BA from country of origin	South Asia	4 years	Two years of qualified employment/ experience at origin	Low-skilled jobs in service sector

The main challenges common to all interviewees fall under five categories: Discrimination and prejudice based on being Asian women or women from the Arab region; navigating Danish laws and rules, namely requirements for maintaining or obtaining a residency status; learning the Danish language; recognition of skills obtained in country of origin; and gaining qualified employment.

In the next section, we present these women's narratives by framing challenges in terms of turning points and epiphanies, with a particular focus on their compounded experiences. Individual narratives are used as examples.

### 2.4.1 *Turning Points Related to Emotional Triggers*

A commonly experienced emotional trigger mentioned by all interviewees is facing discrimination and xenophobic reactions. In some cases, these experiences resulted in either generative or withdrawing epiphanies, thus altering the interviewees' life pathways and course of events.

Amala describes how she has been subjected to such experiences at her workplace, where her manager always assigned her unpleasant tasks and watched to point out any mistake that she might make. Meanwhile, another colleague harassed her:

He would say: "you people are not good people. Asians are s\*\*\* people" or refer to me as "the monkey from Asia." I was crying, and sometimes he would push me. So, it was really hard on me.

Shirisha similarly notes how she was treated differently because of not being European:

It is not because I am not Danish, it is because I am not European. In the workplace and in other places they treat us differently. They give priority to Europeans, and not to us. And on the bus or the train, they look at us differently.

In most cases, such experiences have led our interviewees to withdraw from these situations as they are left feeling that they do not belong in Denmark. Shirisha's way of coping with such experiences is simply to ignore them: 'We are in a different

country now, so it is better if we just ignore it'. Both Shirisha and Alina explain how their network in Denmark consists mainly of other Asian migrants whom they met at their workplace, through language classes, or at Asian festivals. They also emphasise how they otherwise feel excluded and are unsure how to establish new contacts. Habiba elucidates how she does not take it personally when faced with discrimination since she does not consider herself Danish:

I believe it is more difficult for some of my friends who grew up in Denmark but have parents from elsewhere. The difference is that they consider themselves Danish. Me, I am not Danish and will never be. I have a home country.

She echoes the experiences of other interviewees in terms of being delegated the least desirable tasks at her previous workplace and not being considered an equal member of staff. She also remarks on the feeling of isolation and the initial difficulties of resettlement:

Except for our neighbour, who I would sometimes greet in the hallway, I would not see or talk to anyone except for my husband. . . I used to consider it normal, that I would be isolated and left at home attending to the kids and domestic matters. I had no support network back then. My husband's family was on his side, and I did not have any friends yet. I was all alone.

Such incidents trigger emotional turning points amongst our interviewees who realise that gaining a social support system is of the utmost importance to feel a better sense of belonging in Denmark. Most, if not all, of our interviewees have friends from similar ethnic backgrounds or origins, yet they express a keen interest in establishing closer relations with 'native Danes'. They explain how helpful it has been to encounter other female migrants who have been in Denmark for a longer time, since they know how it is to be considered 'an outsider' and recognise how difficult it can be to navigate rules and norms in a new setting, while they feel that they have become familiarised with local systems. Some interviewees have managed to establish a wider social network that includes 'native Danes'. In these cases, interviewees have formed relations through shared interests and engagements.

Aida feels that she is well integrated despite her lack of Danish language skills. She describes how she is involved in a range of activities, several of which she has initiated herself, including a migrant community at her local church, communal dining, an organisation for women that hosts monthly activities, and a catering firm that brings migrant women together to cook. Through these activities she has been able to meet several Danes and appreciate the history of volunteering in Denmark. Dana similarly describes her wedding in a local church in 2007 as a crucial turning point, where she and her husband finally found a network and started to improve their Danish, through their increasing interactions with native Danes at the church.

One interviewee is single, three are married; the other four have undergone difficult divorces with husbands who, in some instances, have been described as 'abusive'. Such experiences of abuse commonly result in a sense of isolation, exhaustion, and low self-esteem – or, as Habiba describes it: 'Due to the lack of support from your partner, you always feel like you are falling behind. . . And when you are falling behind, you don't feel that you are good enough'. Establishing a new

life in a new setting while undergoing such emotional turmoil is not an easy task. Shokouh recounts similar emotional turmoil following her divorce, and explains the sense of hope following the divorce settlement as an emotional turning point triggered by the generative epiphany that she was now 'free':

I fled from my ex-husband. When you flee from a violent person, you have a lot of fear in your body and in your thoughts. When I finished my divorce papers in 2010, I could finally relax a bit. And I was looking forward to the future when I arrived in Denmark. . . I was really happy. It was like I was flying. It was like I thought – after all the problems I had, and anxiety – that now everything was going to get better and I had a lot of hope.

As suggested by our interviews with Habiba and Shokouh, such epiphanies can co-exist in the psychological aftermath of enduring and surviving social control and domestic abuse.

As elaborated by our female interviewees' narrations, having a social support system is crucial for gaining a sense of belonging in a new-found setting. As such, turning points presented in this section either relate to finding a community or to feelings of exclusion and isolation. All interviewees underline how experiences of exclusion lead to withdrawing epiphanies of 'not belonging', or being unable to establish a new life in their state of resettlement, as well as feelings of hopelessness. Although the emotional turning points that have been described thus far pose many challenges, and naturally influence the instrumental turning points (and vice versa), it is the turning points related to instrumental factors that appear to introduce the biggest hurdles in the lives of our interviewees. They all recount struggles related to their employment and residency status as main concerns. It is to these factors that we now turn.

#### ***2.4.2 Turning Points Related to Instrumental Factors***

***Employment and Language-Learning*** For our female interviewees, employment is crucial in their efforts to integrate in their Danish host society. Qualified work often proves the shortest route for migrants to become familiarised with the native language and culture, build a social network, improve mental health, earn trust and respect, and secure the right to apply for permanent residency. A systematised way of ensuring that the previously obtained skills and experience of migrants can be transferred to the Danish labour market would require a skills recognition system at the municipal level as well as specialised LMI programmes aimed at 'bridging the gap' between previously obtained skills and how to apply them in a new-found setting (Pace & Bennetzen, 2020, 2021). In the current environment, 'non-Western' migrants (particularly female refugees) rarely hold work positions that reflect their qualifications and skills – even if their education is obtained in Denmark (Bjerre, 2020; Danish Refugee Council, 2019). This tendency arguably indicates a form of structural racism that builds on preconceived notions of 'non-Western' people and their skills and abilities (Bjerre, 2020; Davis, 1997; DRC Center for Vulnerable Refugees, 2019; Spijkerboer et al., 2000).

Only one of the eight interviewees currently holds a job within her field of competency; the other seven are either unemployed, working in low-wage jobs, performing unskilled labour, or obtaining adult education. A common Danish political narrative is that non-Western migrant women do not want to work or are prevented from working due to cultural constraints (Bjerre, 2020; DRC Center for Vulnerable Refugees, 2019; Olwig, 2011). Our encounters with our eight informants suggest otherwise: They are keen to earn a living, form part of the Danish employment market, and have their skills and experiences recognised and utilised. Many have done several unpaid internships within their respective fields, but are continuously faced with the predicament that even if they perform well, employers commonly prefer to hire ‘native’ Danish graduates for paid positions.

We observed a number of withdrawing epiphanies associated with the lack of opportunities for employment in line with our interviewees’ respective competencies and experience; Amala explains that before moving to Denmark she had expected to find a job that matches her qualifications, but after many unsuccessful applications, she now has a changed view of the Danish labour market:

In [my home country] if you have an education and good grades, people will hire you based on your diploma, but here it is only possible to get a job if you get a recommendation. Network is everything.

Shokouh similarly recounts:

Since 2018, I have sent hundreds of applications, but I have not gotten a job. So, I have lost hope. . . I think they should consider my skills, and my education. . . I have been disappointed many times.

Learning the Danish language is also considered a key challenge. Aisha explains how it was a struggle for her to complete the mandatory Danish language courses, which is a requirement for applying for permanent residency. Likewise, Habiba expounds on how writing in Danish is a significant barrier in her ongoing studies. Shokouh confides that she believes that her Danish is not considered good enough and may be the key reason why she has not managed to secure a job that reflects her skills and qualifications. Aida, Alina, and Shirisha also describe how difficult it can be to find the time to learn Danish while working and similarly underline the difficulty of obtaining qualified employment without being fluent in Danish.

Amala plans to finish her Danish education: ‘It is really important because if I am doing something later to improve myself, I must start with the Danish language. This is the thing I lack the most – being able to speak Danish’. To increase her chances of being hired after finishing her studies, Alina started taking Danish language classes in February 2020; a month later everything was closed due to the Covid-19 lockdown. She is looking forward to language school reopening, noting the difficulty of finding the time and money for the course.

Turning points triggered by similar instrumental factors – as these emerged in the narratives of our female interviewees – mostly stem from the problem of finding qualified employment. While some of our interviewees experienced generative epiphanies, when they recognised that they need to keep struggling to achieve their goals, most are rather discouraged and have had withdrawing epiphanies,

since their skills are not recognised and they fail to gain qualified employment. While most of our interviewees expected to find a job related to their education, they have had to take on unskilled or low-paid jobs to make a living.

Amala realised early on that it would be difficult for her to obtain a job related to her education: 'After a time I understood that it is not so easy to continue with something related to my education'. Instead, she took on a low-wage job in the service and hospitality sector. She was employed there for 2 years, until the COVID-19 lockdown, when she was fired overnight. Alina first applied for jobs in her field of competency but without luck. Today she is working part-time in a low-skilled labour job. She is satisfied with her job but clearly discouraged about career prospects in Denmark: 'I can't get a good job here'. She explains that all her fellow (international) students work as cleaners and dishwashers. She therefore does not include her fellow students as potential contacts that can lead her to a future job in Denmark.

Shirisha too was hoping to work in her field of competency but has only been employed in low-skilled jobs in Denmark. When asked about what she could improve that will enable her to get a job that matches her skills, she replies: 'Language'. Although Aida has more than 30 years of work experience within her field, she is currently working in a low-wage job. Due to her lack of Danish language skills, she is not expecting to obtain qualified employment in the future. Thus, Aida and other interviewees have realised that learning the Danish language is crucial for obtaining qualified employment; without mastering the Danish language most find themselves performing unskilled labour in low-wage positions despite their qualifications and experience. For Aida, this turning point led to the withdrawing epiphany that it is too late for her to gain qualified employment within her field of competency, since time is against her in terms of mastering the Danish language. For Amala, Alina, and Shirisha it became a withdrawing epiphany, that even when knowing the Danish language, it is rather difficult to obtain a job within their respective fields without a solid network in Denmark – particularly among 'native' Danes.

***Encounters with Meso-Level Actors*** Encounters with meso-level actors such as municipal caseworkers, teachers, counsellors, civil society actors, or professional contacts appear to have been of crucial importance, either encouraging or discouraging interviewees from pursuing certain options in their pathways to LMI in Denmark. Facing discrimination or discouragement from meso-level actors are shared experiences amongst our interviewees and have had a fundamental impact on their hopes and aspirations. In some cases, such encounters have led to withdrawing epiphanies, with our interviewees concluding that there was no reason to aspire to attaining their goals. Encouraging encounters with meso-level actors have however also led to generative epiphanies – and even paved the way for more positive labour market experiences amongst our interviewees.

In some cases, our interviewees also experienced a discouraging encounter followed by an encouraging one, as in the case of Habiba:

Last summer [the summer of 2019], I decided to talk to a student counsellor, since I wanted to study...The counsellor was really not nice to me. It was so strange. After he had been speaking for two minutes, he said, you haven't taken any notes, can you remember all the



information I gave you? I told him no, I thought you were going to help me apply. He responded: If you are not even taking notes now, you will definitely not be able to manage the educational programme.

The counsellor also told Habiba that she did not meet the requirements and did not have enough experience to apply for the educational programme: ‘At the end, he was the reason I waited six months before applying. I was left crying and discouraged, thinking I cannot do this’. At the time, Habiba already had a BA in the same field of study as well as work experience in this field of competency from her country of origin.

Habiba’s encounter with the student counsellor is a good example of a discouraging encounter that led her to a withdrawing epiphany: feeling that she might as well give up on her aspirations of, once again, being educated as a teacher. Fortunately, a chance encounter with another student counsellor provided her with the encouragement she needed; a counsellor at the adult education center (*Voksen Uddannelses Center*, VUC) helped her apply and qualify in the required subjects. This, in turn, enabled her to be eligible to apply for her education: ‘If I had not received this support, I would not have finished my studies’, she remarks.

Aisha similarly notes that she would have been in an entirely different situation if it was not for the ‘great people’ she was fortunate enough to meet. At the time of the interview, she was working in her field of competence, something which she says would not have been possible without the support of her municipal contact person as well as a specific LMI programme for refugees hosted by ‘DJ’, *Dansk Journalistforbund* (the Danish Journalists Association). Their assistance helped her understand the workings of the Danish labour market, while she made contact with her current employer through the DJ LMI programme specifically for journalists with a refugee background.

By contrast to our other interviewees, Aisha was positively surprised by her contact person at the municipal job center who thought ‘outside the box’. She insisted that her municipality contact person facilitated her enrollment onto an English course, since it would be useful for obtaining employment. She was then granted access to a private English course specialised in media communications that later proved to be a significant advantage in securing her current job. These instrumental turning points paved the way for Aisha soon after her arrival in Denmark. Although she has an outstanding résumé and a keen motivation to work in journalism, she is acutely aware of the importance of such encounters, as a key turning point in her work-life path: ‘It is not because I am a heroine. I have had a lot of help. I met the right people at the right time’.

Aisha’s integration narrative is unfortunately a rare one. Most of our interviewees describe discouraging encounters, especially with municipal caseworkers. Shokouh, for instance, felt pressured by the municipality when her job ended and she had to look for another:

I think my case worker was tough on me. . . She pushed me to work in a nursing home. But I said “I can’t.” I’ve tried working in an elderly home before [back in 2002] and it was not good for me. . . They [case workers] cannot understand us. When you have experienced war, blood, and problems, you cannot look at a person who is ill or weak. It [working at an elderly

home] was hard on me and made me revisit my bad memories. I have seen so much blood and death with my own eyes. . . They [case workers] should pay attention to people and what they have experienced. But she [the case worker] pushed me.

To avoid the constant pressure from the municipality, Shokouh decided to borrow money from friends, enroll in a one-year education in the beauty sector, and become self-employed. This turning point in her life, triggered by instrumental factors, was based on an epiphanic moment when she realised that she was not able to provide for her family and pursue her professional aspirations in line with her education; she had to choose a different path in order to become financially stable and ensure the well-being of her children.

This refers to another shared experience amongst our interviewees; pointing at withdrawal epiphanies when the municipality ended up not being the right place to seek support and guidance. Rather, they quickly realised that they had to rely on friends, professional contacts, and in some cases civil society actors or counsellors. Amala, for instance, was positively surprised when she found help at an NGO after giving birth to her daughter: 'I got help from them. Mentally, and for finding a job'. Amala was told about this initiative by a healthcare provider (*sundhedsplejerske*) who made house visits for new mothers: 'If you want, you can go there, spend some time with your baby. And if you have questions, they can provide you with some answers'. The same NGO helped her practice her Danish. She concludes: 'I am really happy to be able to mention this because they helped me [unlike the municipality, which did not]'.

***Time Aspects Related to Resettlement, Residency Status, and Legal Requirements*** Some timely aspects related to the resettling process are considered extremely stressful by our female interviewees (as well as other refugees and migrants we have interviewed in the past). All migrants face ticking clocks, which regulate key aspects of their (migration and) integration process. For most of our interviewees, time plays a crucial role in how they balance their role as mothers, on the one hand, and their personal aspirations for getting integrated into Denmark's labour market, on the other. For instance, Amala explains how she and her husband would like to have another child, but do not want to risk 'the delay'; she can only extend her visa so many times, and if she has not managed to obtain a permanent residency within 10 years, she will have to return to her home country. This stresses her a lot, and it affects their family life: 'If I have a child now, I will be delayed for two years' in meeting the requirements for a permanent residency, where one has to have been employed for 3.5 out of 4 years prior to the processing of the application.

Equally important is the time our interviewees spent 'waiting for a decision' – a decision to have their educational certificates from their countries of origin certified in Denmark or a decision to be granted permanent residency status. The lives of some of our interviewees were placed on hold, because they were deemed to be unskilled, or as not having the required economic resources to invest in their host society. This, in turn, makes it extremely difficult to meet the requirements for permanent residency – specifically in terms of employment and language skills.

What our biographical narratives reveal is that the hopes of our female interviewees are often left suspended, while they await a decision and weigh their options. Shokouh, for instance, waited for 8 years to have her previously-obtained educational certificate from her home country recognised by the Danish Ministry of Education. During this waiting period, she had a strong withdrawal epiphany, triggered by the recognition that it was not possible for her to find work in the education sector in Denmark.

It is an established argument among researchers and asylum lawyers, that Danish immigration laws are made intentionally difficult to navigate, with associated requirements made deliberately challenging to meet (Bendixen, 2019b; Canning, 2019). Moreover, Danish asylum and immigration laws are inherently gendered. For instance, when a female refugee arrives with her spouse, her claim for asylum is commonly not treated independently. Rather, she is granted a consequence status as a result of her husband's claim for asylum (Bennetzen, 2020; Bendixen, 2020c). This places the female refugee in a liminal position, since she would have to make an independent plea for asylum in the event of divorce, which increases the risk of repatriation. In cases where the asylum claims of female refugees are treated independently, they are commonly granted a weaker asylum status than their male counterparts, namely a temporary protection status (Sect. 7.3). As such, female refugees often do not have the same rights as male refugees, while the risk of repatriation is significantly higher (Bennetzen, 2020).

Amala explains how she holds a spousal visa and wishes to become more independent from her husband:

‘In Denmark, men and women are equal, but on a spousal visa, you are not [equal]. Until you get permanent residency, you are dependent on your spouse and his willingness to “extend” your stay. If I get divorced, I will have been here for five years doing nothing’ [subtracting the years being pregnant and on leave, since they do not count when applying for permanent residency].

The time she has spent taking on low-skilled jobs has not added to her career prospects: ‘It has only been a means to do “something” and qualify for staying’.

Moreover, requirements for family reunification as well as for obtaining permanent residency have been continuously tightened in recent years (Bendixen, 2015; Bendixen, 2017). Here, applying for permanent residency requires having been in Denmark for the previous 8 years, finishing Danish language classes at a very high level, passing a ‘citizenship test’ (*medborgerskabsprøve*) and having been employed full-time for the previous 4 years as well as having a certain annual income level (The Danish Immigration Law, 2022). These, as well as many other requirements for obtaining permanent residency, pose a significant barrier for most migrants in Denmark, who are desperately seeking to obtain the right to stay permanently.

Habiba is currently far from qualifying for permanent residency, but wants to finish her education as quickly as possible, so she can apply for permanent residency after 4 years of working. She remarks on the difficulties of all the rules and requirements:

I have struggled a lot here. In my home country, there are many other disadvantages: Illness. . .and, the country does not work. In this country, you have so many things offered to you, but at the same time, you are sad. I am sad that things are not working out. . .You are controlled by many things. The rules in the country. . .You need to do this, and this, and this in order to get a permanent residence permit, for example.

She echoes a recurring epiphany that triggered similar turning points amongst our interviewees; the imposition of ever-changing rules in the Danish immigration system that keeps their life suspended. In the next section, we organise the factors that trigger epiphanies in the pathways of our interviewees, in the form of a typology.

## **2.5 Actors and Factors that Trigger Epiphanies and Turning Points in Interviewees' Integration Pathways**

Table 2.3 is a matrix identifying the key actors and factors that triggered turning points/epiphanies in our interviewees' integration narratives. We further elaborate on these actors and factors below.

As shown in Table 2.3, key actors have emerged as both helpful or constraining in the biographies of these women, particularly municipal case workers. Across all eight narratives, friends have figured as playing a pivotal role in these women's lives, particularly those with similar backgrounds or ethnic origin. Each interviewee narrates how friends have helped them expand their network, taught them how to navigate the Danish system and rules – or both. Since four women do not have relatives in Denmark, family – more often than not – does not figure as an enabling factor during their resettlement. Both Habiba and Shokouh report having faced social control or domestic violence in their marriages. Interviewees with refugee status recount worries about family members back in their home countries, and grieving lost loved ones, without having the option of seeing their family. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all women with children find meaning in struggling to secure a safe future for them.

Encounters with meso-level actors such as municipality caseworkers, civil society actors, counsellors, and teachers as well as professional contacts have been of crucial importance in relation to how the life paths of these women have unfolded. Meso-level actors have either provided guidance and support or discouraged them in fundamental ways, which underlines the significance of such actors and their efforts (or lack thereof) in supporting newcomers.

While Shokouh had an unfortunate and discouraging encounter with a municipal caseworker, Aisha felt supported and encouraged by her caseworker, who facilitated her access to an English language course, which has helped her secure her current job. Habiba went to the local municipality on her own initiative, since she initially did not receive any offers to participate in job-related courses or programmes. Her caseworker did however help her secure a position, which initially was an internship.

**Table 2.3** Typology of Key Actors and Factors

	Personal/ Friends/Family (micro)	State policies/ support (macro)	Civil society support (meso)	Educational/ Training institutions (meso)	Professional contacts (meso)
Habiba	Husband (-) / close ethnic community (-)/close friend (+) Personal resil- ience (+) Personal exhaustion* (-)	Danish strict legis- lation (-)/Danish lack of skills profil- ing mechanism (-)		College counsellor (-) Second col- lege coun- sellor (+) Danish lan- guage (-)	
Shokouh	Husband (-) Family (+) Close friends (+) Personal resil- ience (+) Personal exhaustion* (-)	Danish lack of skills profiling mecha- nism (-) Municipal case- worker (-)	NGO (+)		
Aisha	Husband (-) Friends (+) Personal resil- ience (+) Personal exhaustion* (-)	Municipality con- tact person (+)		Danish lan- guage (-)	Danish jour- nalists union (+)
Dana	Husband (+) Personal exhaustion (-)	Municipality con- tact person (-) Danish lack of skills profiling (-)	Local church community (+)		
Aida	Family (+) Personal resil- ience (+)	Municipality con- tact person (+) Danish lack of skills profiling (-)	Local church community (+)	Danish lan- guage (-)	
Amala	Colleagues (-) Husband (+/-) Close ethnic community (+) Personal exhaustion (-)	Danish lack of skills profiling (-) Municipality con- tact person (-)	NGO (+)	Danish lan- guage (-)	
Alina	Close ethnic community (+) Personal resil- ience (+)	Danish lack of skills profiling (-)		Danish lan- guage (-) University studies (+)	

(continued)

**Table 2.3** (continued)

	Personal/ Friends/Family (micro)	State policies/ support (macro)	Civil society support (meso)	Educational/ Training institutions (meso)	Professional contacts (meso)
Shirisha	Husband (+) Close ethnic community (+) Co-workers (+/-) Personal resil- ience (+)	Danish lack of skills profiling (-)		Danish lan- guage (-)	

<sup>a</sup> Personal exhaustion relates to our eight interviewees' struggling for recognition and a sense of worth in their new host society, Denmark. Personal resilience refers to continuous hopes and perseverance despite numerous setbacks

Amala and Shokouh mentioned positive encounters with civil society organisations as enabling factors in a Danish context. Meanwhile, Aisha (in a recent conversation) mentions an encounter with a Danish teacher at the language school as a discouraging experience. He reportedly told her that he did not believe she would be able to finish her courses and pass the exams; she did however prove him wrong. Habiba mentions an educational counsellor who discouraged her from initially applying to the education programme that would allow her, once again, to study within her field of competency. He similarly suggested that she would not be able to undertake the studies and complete her education. It was another counsellor at the VUC who supported her in obtaining the final courses necessary to apply to her preferred educational programme and helped her with her application. As she explains, if it was not for his support, she probably would have given up. For Aisha, it was the union, DJ, and their job-training programme for refugee journalists that helped her secure her current work position. Socially, most of these women established themselves through their ethnic or local (church) communities.

As illustrated through these biographical narratives, meso-level actors have played a crucial role and have often triggered instrumental as well as emotional turning points in the lives of our interviewees that have either led to generative or withdrawing epiphanies. For newcomers who do not have a solid network in the host society and who do not yet know Danish rules or systems, such encounters can shape their life path: In terms of having their previously obtained skills or qualifications recognised, knowing their rights, securing a job or being unemployed, in meeting the requirements to apply for permanent residency, in terms of forming part of society or becoming excluded from it, and ultimately, in terms of remaining hopeful or losing hope. Although rules and laws at the macro-level are of crucial importance, our observations and findings show that meso-level encounters serve as key determinants in migrants' labour market integration in host societies.

The eight interviewees whose biographies are presented in this chapter are resilient women who have continuously struggled during their resettlement process in Denmark. Along the way, they have managed to overcome many obstacles, and it

is our contention that the majority of our interviewees will keep insisting on their individual rights, skills, and aspirations.

## 2.6 Concluding Remarks

Withdrawing epiphanies are most prevalent in the integration narratives of our eight interviewees, while generative epiphanies need to be considered in light of their on-going struggles and the discrimination and xenophobia they describe. Our analysis reveals that when hopes are continuously crushed, expectations are lowered. The degree of gratitude that our interviewees express when being recognised as capable individuals with fundamental rights, bear witness to the discrimination to which these women have continuously been subjected. As their narratives reveal, these are often shared experiences. The most frequent experiences amongst these women are related to the insecurity triggered by being referred to as ‘non-Western’ female migrants in Denmark, specifically in official government discourses and with regard to employment and residency status. Meanwhile, interviewees with a refugee status experience losing family members who are still in their home (war torn) countries, while having to deal with the psychological aftermath that results from past trauma(s).

Meanwhile, this chapter has emphasised how mental health disorders can create long-term barriers to integration into host societies, and that much of the emotional suffering of resettled migrants, is directly related to stresses of the present and concerns for the future. Instrumental factors, such as learning Danish, gaining employment, and having to navigate Danish rules and legislation emerge as shared challenges that cause a great deal of anxiety amongst our interviewees, since these factors fundamentally relate to personal safety and financial security as well as to gaining a sense of identity and belonging in their new setting.

As this chapter has shown, migrant women face gender-specific challenges in navigating daily life at every stage of their migration and (labour market) integration experience in Denmark. Common challenges among our interviewees include: Past traumatic experiences of domestic or invisible violence or imprisonment; challenging relations with their former or current husbands; instances of discrimination (including host society legal barriers and interactions with work colleagues); lack of recognition of educational qualifications from their countries of origin; recognition (or lack thereof) of previously-obtained skills and individual competencies; mastering the host society’s language; isolation and loneliness; lack of a network outside of their close knit communities; unempathetic municipal case workers, counsellors or teachers; lack of access to appropriate information from municipalities and from educational establishments; and a gendered approach to asylum rights and provision of residencies.

Generally, prevalent gender assumptions about women originating from the ‘Arab world’ or Asia intensify female migrants’ lack of presence in their host societies (‘I am not Danish nor will I ever be’) and sense of fragmentation (‘You

need to do this, and this, and this in order to get a permanent residence permit'). More broadly, our findings reflect Denmark's integration strategy regarding the 'burdensome' refugees versus the 'valuable' non-refugee migrants (Bjerre, 2020).

Another key finding from our interview data is the issue of time: From the moment they make the decision to migrate, to the situation they find themselves in when struggling to integrate into the labour market of their host society, migrants face ticking clocks, which regulate key aspects of their migration and integration process. For all of our interviewees, time plays a crucial role in how they structure and balance their lives. For instance, in their role as mothers, on the one hand, and their struggles to become integrated into Denmark's labour markets, on the other. Our interviewees share concerns about 'wasting too much time' on repeating educational programmes, or taking up unskilled work in order to qualify for permanent residency status, which will allow them to stay in Denmark. Equally important is the time our interviewees spent 'waiting for a decision', such as to have their certificates from their country of origin recognised in Denmark, or qualifying for / awaiting a verdict when applying for permanent residency.

The lives of our interviewees have been put on hold for a long period, because they have been deemed as unskilled or as not having the required economic resources to invest in their host society, or not qualified to apply for studies or for permanent residency. These biographical narratives reveal that the hopes of our female interviewees are often left suspended, while they are placed in a liminal position awaiting decisions and weighing their present and future options. We conclude, that our interviewees had two types of navigation strategies in these contexts: one, based on a generative epiphany that led them to sustain their resilience, perseverance, and hope for their futures in Denmark; or, the other, based on a withdrawal epiphany, where our informants lacked presence and felt 'fragmented'. Thus, despite structural barriers, this chapter has simultaneously served to elucidate the agency of our interviewees; their hopes, aspirations, struggles and perseverance in their continuous quest to make their host society habitable. In other words, although their experiences of LMI in Denmark reveal the foundational nature and logics of Denmark's integration regime, our interviewees managed to develop coping mechanisms in their encounters with said regime.

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