**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**

# *Navigating Uncertainty:*

## *An Analysis of the Settlement Process of Ukrainian female refugees in Denmark*

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**Abstract**

The present thesis aims to examine the subjective experiences of highly skilled Ukrainian female refugees in Denmark and how they navigate their conditions in relation to their settlement in the host country. Hence, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with Ukrainian refugees who have fled Ukraine, as a result of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and currently reside in Denmark. Our research is based on inductive reasoning and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is applied as a research method, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of our participants' personal accounts of how they navigate their settlement process through social connections and their individual aspirations.

Our findings demonstrate how the social solidarity in relation to the welcoming reception of Ukrainian refugees by the Danish society have prompted a sense of belonging and helped the female Ukrainian refugees to pursue their aspirations. However, an important finding of our analysis is the negative encounter with the prolonged bureaucratic state processes and the lack of individual approach in the integration apparatus. It is further argued that individuals' social networks, English language skills, along with their aspirations serve as facilitators of our participants' settlement process in Denmark. Our participants' aspirations reflect the subjective realm of their various forms of embodied capital. Hence, this thesis investigates how they strategise to convert and validate their cultural and symbolic resources within the new social context, while attempting to pursue their aspirations to reach self-realisation. Furthermore, this study also demonstrates how social identity can affect Ukrainian female refugees' aspiration processes.

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# 1. Introduction

The onset of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, has led to severe humanitarian challenges the Ukrainian nation is still facing. Despite the major efforts of the various actors of the international community to address and cease the ongoing war Ukrainian people continue to experience hardship, whilst missile attacks and air assaults are still ongoing. These attempts, though continuing, have yet to fully mitigate the suffering of the people of Ukraine, while insecurity and fear persist (Albrecht & Panchenko, 2022).

On a larger scale, the European Union has been working towards finding a resolution to the situation, in collaboration with international stakeholders, as well as engaging to provide and support those affected by the war. Furthermore, through legislative measures, the European Union has activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) to facilitate the mobility of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the conflict. The activation of the TPD represents a significant step forward in the EU's measures to address and manage the refugee inflow of millions of displaced people impacted by the conflict (European Commission, 2022). On a state level, in Denmark, a new law has been implemented, on the basis of TPD, which provides a domestic legal framework for handling the refugee influx, as well as facilitating the process of granting Ukrainian refugees protection.

Considering the urgent implementation of specific laws, related to ensuring the smooth mobility of Ukrainians refugees within the European Union, as well as the introduction of the Danish Special Act, outlining their rights in Denmark regarding their settlement, we found it interesting to examine the subjective experience of Ukrainian refugees and their life in Denmark, as well as to investigate how they navigate the conditions provided for them in the host country.

We investigate the experiences of highly skilled female Ukrainian refugees through the lens of four theoretical frameworks: Honneth's Theory of Recognition, Bourdieu's Forms of Capital, Appadurai's notions of the Capacity to Aspire, and Jenkins' Social Identity Theory. We will employ these theories in order to provide a framework for deeper understanding of our participants' experiences as well as to provide valuable insights into the main themes identified within the context of social solidarity and legal recognition of rights, embodied capital and its

convertibility, refugees' capability to pursue their aspiration as well as the process of identification, which were identified as to the experiences of refugees.

By applying these concepts, we aim to shed light on the ways in which highly skilled female Ukrainian refugees experience their lives in Denmark, and how they navigate their conditions in relation to settlement and integration. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by these women and inform the development of more effective and inclusive support mechanisms for refugees.

## 1.1 Problem area and research question

The aim of the thesis is to explore the lived experience of highly skilled Ukrainian refugees in Denmark and to investigate more in-depth how they manoeuvre their settlement process, with regards to their access to the labour market opportunities and housing. Moreover, we would like to investigate their experience in relation to encounters within the Danish system and the Danish society and how they navigate the conditions in relation to settling in Denmark. Also, we would like to explore the challenges and opportunities they may face in this process. Based on their background we seek to examine if and to what extent highly skilled Ukrainian women manage to utilize their professional experience and educational background.

During the recruitment phase of our project, we discovered that all of the individuals who expressed interest in participating were highly skilled female refugees fleeing from the war in Ukraine. Our participants, all have completed high level education and have had occupations in Ukraine. Given this, it was important to clarify and emphasize the scope of our project, which focuses on the experiences of five highly-skilled refugees from Ukraine. By highlighting the specific skills and experiences of our participants, we aim to provide a nuanced and in-depth exploration of how they navigate the challenges and opportunities faced they may face in the host country.

Therefore, the thesis aims to answer the following research question:

*How do highly skilled female Ukrainian refugees experience their life in Denmark and how do they navigate their conditions in relation to settlement in Denmark?*

## 1.2 Contextual Background

This chapter aims to situate our research within the political environment surrounding the inflow of Ukrainian refugees. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context in which our research takes place, we have discussed the origins of the war in Ukraine and the related policies at the European Union level. Additionally, we have examined the Danish response to the refugee influx, including the implementation of the Special Act and the conditions faced by Ukrainian refugees in Denmark, based on the newly introduced Act. By situating our research within this political context, we aim to provide a nuanced and informed analysis of the experiences and challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Denmark.

In March 2014, the Russian Federation annexed Crimea, a region of Ukraine. This event took place in the aftermath of ongoing military tension between Russia and Ukraine. The annexation followed an armed intervention by the forces of the Russian Federation, a referendum, and the issue of a declaration of independence in Crimea. This annexation was a gross violation of international law, and the first time a member of the United Nations Security Council used force to annex the territory of another UN member (Grant, 2015). The Russian military invasion of the eastern regions of Ukraine has caused a significant increase in the internal displacement of nearly 1.3 million people in Ukraine. As of May 2015, approximately 20,000 of them fled Crimea (Zaverukha, 2016; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2016; UNHCR, 2015).

At the time, the European Union policy-making, in relation to asylum and protection, was primarily focused on trying to control and reduce the number of people seeking asylum following the unprecedented so-called European refugee crisis, when nearly 1.5 million people arrived in Europe from countries like Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Due to plans to improve and strengthen the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) stalled, individual Member States had been trying to shut their borders for refugees (Parusel, 2020; Parusel & Varfolomieieva, 2022). Therefore, during the ongoing conflict in 2014, the EU "similarly closed its doors" to people fleeing Ukraine (Lloyd & Sirkeci, 2022 p. 528).

The Russian aggression in Ukraine continued after the annexation of Crimea, resulting in the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine that started on 24th February 2022. In response, the European Union undertook rapid actions in order to facilitate the mobility of Ukrainian refugees within its borders in response to the large refugee influx along with vigorous sanctioning policy implied towards Russia. According to operational data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - more than 7 million refugees have fled the war across Europe (as of 17 September 2022) (UNHCR, 2022).

The European Council took a quick decision to activate a Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) to alleviate the process of offering protection to Ukrainians fleeing the war. The same directive was adopted in 2001, following the mass refugee influx that emerged in Europe in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars in the 90s, and was now activated for the first time since then. Hence, the TPD was implemented as a new mechanism to be activated, if necessary, to secure temporary protection for displaced persons from outside the EU. The purpose of the TPD as a standard EU instrument was to alleviate the process of receiving a large refugee wave in the Member States and ease the asylum apparatus in the respective member states (Beirens et al., 2016, p. 4-5). Also, collective protection allows for many people to be helped quickly and reduces the burden on the asylum system (Gerlach & Ryndzak, 2022).

The implementation of TPD grants refugees the right to live, work, and access healthcare, housing, and education in the EU for one year, with the possibility of extending the period to up to three years by significantly reducing the time of asylum procedures (European Commission, 2022). According to TPD, refugees have the legal right to access the labour market, adhering to the rules and policies applicable to the given member state (European Commission, 2022). The collective protection of displaced people allows for helping many people without delay in emergencies and reduces the pressure on the system of granting asylum. Respectively, the member states have introduced reforms not only to their asylum procedures but also have modified specific policies in order to facilitate immediate access of the refugees to the labour market. (Arendt et al., 2022)

Due to its opt-out from EU legal issues, Denmark is not obligated to comply with the recently activated EU Temporary Protection Directive. However, on the 16th February 2022, the Danish government urgently implemented its own national scheme similar to the EU Directive and passed the Danish Special Act (Særlov), allowing Ukrainian displaced persons to be

immediately granted temporary protection. Therefore, a Ukrainian refugee who arrives in Denmark obtains the right to live and work in Denmark, receiving a temporary residence permit and instant access to education for persons under 18 years, as well as access to the Danish labour market. Thus, based the Special Act, refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine benefit from the fast procedure and are also protected from having their permits revoked (European Commission, 2022).

According to the Special Act, Ukrainian refugees have the right to be granted temporary residence permits for a period of two years (until March 17th, 2024), with the possibility of extending the permit for an additional year. Refugees are entitled to work, access education and vocational training, health care, social welfare, participation in national integration programs, language courses and housing. As of 11th of December, more than 36.200 Ukrainians have applied for a residence permit under the Special Act, of whom 31.198 people have been distributed amongst all Danish municipalities (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2022).

In terms of housing, refugees have the possibility to stay in a reception center until they receive their permit and are relocated to a particular municipality. Hence, municipalities are responsible to relocate Ukrainian refugees within four days after they have received their permit, as opposed to the usual 30-60 days for other refugees in the regular asylum system (NCM, 2022; European Commission, 2022). Due to the short period of relocation, Ukrainians may be accommodated in different types of housing, such as emergency accommodations in unused schools, refurbished sports facilities, and welfare facilities. However, many Ukrainian refugees reside in private housing, which are provided with a daily allowance by the Danish municipalities in order to cover refugees' sustenance and rental expenses. In addition, those awaiting a decision on their residence permit have access to essential medical services, and once they have a temporary permit and a Danish civil registration number, they are entitled to free treatment in most medical institutions on equal footing with other residents (NCM, 2022; The Danish Ministry of Health, 2022).

Furthermore, in April 2022, the Danish government decided that refugees from Ukraine will be given the opportunity to work in Denmark before their residence permit is being issued, as soon as they have submitted an application for a residence permit under the special law and have registered their biometrics (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2022).

It is worth noting that from a historical perspective, it is not the first time that Denmark has had a positive reception of refugees. In the 1990s, during the Balkan Wars, Denmark welcomed specific groups of refugees and introduced special arrangements regarding their protection. Then, Denmark received 17.000 refugees, the majority of which were Bosnians (Barslund et al., 2017; Barslund et al., 2016).

The activation of the TPD and the legitimization of the special law in Denmark, granting Ukrainian refugees special protection, have been implemented in the light of an immensely positive response from the majority of EU member states, showing a high level of compassion for Russia's military aggression in Ukraine (De Conick, 2022, p.2). This empathy was also demonstrated by a large number of civilians driving to neighboring EU borders in order to offer refugees a safe place to stay.  through the overall attitude of the member states' people towards refugees fleeing Ukraine.

Notably, the EU has manifested remarkable unity and willingness to help and protect refugees from Ukraine. This stands in contrast to the EU's response to "other situations of refugee arrivals in the EU or at the EU's external borders over the past few years" (Parusel & Varfolomieieva, 2022 p.6). The rapid measures helping facilitate the Ukrainian migration as well as the overall urgent support and welcoming attitude in Europe differ from the situation in the 2010s when the European atmosphere was generally hostile towards the Syrian refugees. These prompt measures also allowing Ukrainians to access the labour market immediately along with their right to work without any restrictions (OECD, 2022), add an essential insight to the perception of Ukrainian refugees and the urgent support they were welcomed with on overall EU level. Albeit, the roots of these differing attitudes are not addressed in this paper, these are found to be interesting for further investigation in future research.

Understanding the current political situation and the European Union' response towards the millions of people fleeing the war in Ukraine along with the Danish Special Act they are affected by, provides an important framework for interpreting the data that is collected during the research. Moreover, it can help identify and analyse more effectively potential barriers to refugees' well-being and integration. Considering the current urgently implemented rules in relation to facilitating Ukrainians' mobility and their rights in the host country could help examine more in-depth refugees' lived experiences and perception of their life in Denmark,

also it may be beneficial in order to highlight how they navigate challenges and opportunities in relation to their settlement in the country.

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods used in the study with regards to the use of qualitative approach and inductive reasoning. The key concepts and principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) are introduced as they relate to studying human experiences and phenomena. The chapter consists of a description of our sampling process and the participants' selection criteria. Also, limitations and ethical considerations that were taken into account during the research process are discussed. Overall, the chapter aims to provide a clear understanding of the approaches and methods used in this thesis and how they contribute to the overall aims and objectives of the research.

### 2.1 Qualitative method

A qualitative method was employed for this study. By using a qualitative research method, we were able to collect rich and detailed data about participants' experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 289). Moreover, the qualitative method is relevant to the aim of the current research as it assumes the "understanding of human experience" within a given context and "it is concerned with subjective meanings" (Silverman, 2021, p. 3).

### 2.2 Inductive approach

Our research is conducted based on an inductive approach, as our aim is to focus on the meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to their experiences, rather than on testing pre-existing hypotheses or theories. It is assumed that an inductive approach is reasonable for researching the experience of Ukrainian refugees in Denmark and how they navigate the conditions related to their settlement in the host country, because it allows researchers to begin with the analysis of the subjective experiences of the participants and avoid making assumptions or imposing preconceived ideas.

Inductive reasoning involves the process of building and recognizing themes and patterns from the data, where the researcher starts by gathering detailed information from participants and then organizes it into categories or themes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). These themes are further developed into broad patterns, theories, or generalizations that can be compared to personal experiences or existing literature on the topic.

Hence, the inductive process suggests "working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 234). Additionally, an inductive approach allows us to consider the broader social and cultural context in which refugees live, and to consider the various factors that may be influencing their experiences.

**2.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Our methodology is rooted in the traditions of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which is an interpretative approach to studying human experiences and phenomena. Moreover, we have chosen to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as our analysis strategy for the data gathered which we will discuss further below in section 2.6. Also, IPA is relevant to use in inductive research in order to explore and understand the subjective experiences of individuals within a particular social context (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53).

The IPA approach we take our point of departure from, is primarily built upon a phenomenological approach which entails understanding the lifeworld of our participants (Ibid.), hence examining our interviewees' perception. Understanding the lifeworld of our participants is especially useful, as IPA intends to grasp the significant life transitions of individuals (Smith et al., 2022, p. 2). This study focuses on the lived experience of female Ukrainian refugees and how they navigate their new life transition in Denmark regarding their settlement process and affiliation to the labour market.

Following a phenomenological approach, the researcher takes on an active position to comprehend the participant's personal experience of the world they find themselves in (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53). Therefore, our investigation has been a dynamic process following an inductive approach, as we have been open to the perspectives of what our participants have

found essential. Thus, we also engage in the inductive procedures of IPA, which aim to interpret meanings (Smith et al., 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to engage in an "interpretive relationship with the transcript" (Smith et al. 2007, p. 66), in order to gain understanding of the respondent's subjective meanings in their story. This to a large extent, has influenced the theoretical path we have chosen to proceed with. This approach is also in line with one of the essential founders of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl's philosophy about returning "to the things in themselves" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 2). Therefore, we intend to follow this approach when analysing our empirical material instead of using a predefined lens with theoretical concepts.

However, it should be mentioned that IPA's aim is not as comprehensive as Husserl's aim. Instead, IPA intends to "capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 11). Hereby IPA tries to reach an understanding of the participant's insider perspective. However, this aim cannot be entirely fulfilled because of the researcher's preunderstandings of theoretical notions that will be impossible to avoid – as a result, the interpretative activity becomes relevant (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53). While processing the empirical data, we have kept this limitation in our mind and aimed to work critically and actively with these preunderstandings.

Moreover, we have been inspired by what Heidegger defines as a double hermeneutic, a concept particularly relevant in qualitative research. Smith and Osborn (2007) argue that Heidegger's concept of double hermeneutic emphasizes the role of language and interpretation in understanding, and is particularly relevant when "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53.). Therefore, we as researchers are trying to understand the meanings and experiences of participants in their own terms. According to Smith and Osborne (2007), a double hermeneutic approach involves both the researcher and the participant interpreting and understanding the data and meaning of the research process. Thus, both the researcher and the participant bring their own perspectives and interpretations simultaneously, also during the interview. Hereby this two-staged interpretation process shapes the empirical findings of the research. .

**2.4 Sampling methods and selection criteria**

Participants were recruited using a purposive and snowball sampling technique in qualitative research. In IPA, the usage of purposive sampling aims at selecting participants closely related to the research question and is likely to provide valuable insights into the experiences of individuals and the context in which they occur (Smith & Osborn, 2007). We find a small sample size is suitable for this study, as one of the main intentions of IPA is to examine "the detailed account of individual experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). In addition, snowball sampling has also been used to "help encourage other cases to take part in the study, thereby increasing sample size" (Taherdoost, 2017, p. 22). Therefore, we have asked participants who were already interviewed if they could refer us to someone who may also be interested in the research. This type of sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria and using their referrals to identify additional participants who may also be appropriate for the study as well as it can help reach specific groups or communities (ibid.).

Furthermore, in order to meet our selection criteria to ensure that the data gathered is relevant to the research question, we have recruited five Ukrainian refugees who had been granted a residence permit under the Special Act in Denmark. In addition, to be eligible to participate in the study, individuals had to be over the age of 18 and had to be able to speak and understand English. Individuals who met these criteria were invited to participate in the study through outreach to various volunteer-driven local refugee community centers, in cooperation with the Danish Refugee Council. Moreover, one of the community centers, facilitated our connection to a municipal employee, who frequently appears in the center to assist Ukrainian refugees. She turned out to be a helpful gatekeeper and helped us to find two participants for our research. Interviewees were also selected through online recruitment efforts via posts in Facebook groups, including "Ukrainian refugees in Denmark. Українські біженці в Данії." as well as two local Facebook groups of a given municipality, which will not be mentioned concretely here to keep refugees' sensitive information undisclosed, as agreed upon.

**2.5 Data collection**

For the purpose of this study, five semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian refugees residing in Denmark were conducted from October to November 2022. These qualitative interviews

provide a detailed investigation of the individual's experiences and offer the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the context in which the research phenomena are located. Semi-structured interviews, avail the conversation to flow naturally and follow tangents based on the responses of the interviewee. Thus, researchers can "analyze in detail how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them" (Smith and Osborn, 2007, p. 57). Additionally, the semi-structured approach allows the participants to express themselves freely and to share their thoughts and feelings in their own words, providing valuable insights into their experiences (ibid.).

The semi-structured interviews were guided by a set of pre-determined questions that were organized into six distinct sections. These questions were chosen to elicit information relevant to the study and were included in an interview guide for use during the interviews. The main aspects of interest and the questions related to them were, as follows: *Background questions* (incl. age, country of origin, current place of residence, marital status, educational background, professional background in the home country as well as in Denmark); *Questions about refugee experience and refugee status* (arrival in Denmark, settlement process, waiting process in terms of registering in Denmark, living conditions, settlement assistance); *Questions related to experience with host society* (experience with Danish society' reception, interaction with members of the Danish society, encounter of preconceptions); *Labour market affiliation* (job-seeking process, plans in terms of work/education in Denmark); *Question related to refugee identity* (impact on identity, challenges faced as a refugee); *Questions related to adaptation to their life in Denmark* (coping mechanism, help from the Danish state/institutions/volunteers). The guide has been refined according to the inductive approach, which help us to be open to add new questions to the guide, found to be relevant to newly discovered themes introduced by our participants. Also, the guide has been modified along the way to ensure that it is both effective and efficient in gathering the necessary data.

The time duration of the interviews varied from approximately an hour to an hour and a half each. All participants provided informed consent before the interview. They were all conducted in English and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

**2.6 Data analysis strategy**

The section that follows will present the main steps, we adhered to while building the IPA, as outlined by Smith and Osborn (2003).

In the first step, the transcript is read and reread multiple times, in this process some quotes that we have found important, are noted down. Then, these notes are commented upon, with attempts for association and initial preliminary interpretations.

In the second step, the notes previously taken are refined and condensed into phrases, that effectively convey the main themes found in the text. The aim of step two is to transform notes into themes, by identifying and using the expressions that may be related to theory, while still remaining closely tied to the unique details of each response. At this point of IPA, the entire transcript is viewed as data without any selective focus on a specific section. In addition, the number of themes that arise will depend on the richness of the particular section.

In the third step of the process, the researcher attempts to understand if and how the themes found are connected. Subsequently, themes are organised in a more analytical and theoretical manner. This stage involves grouping related themes and checking if these connections make sense in relation to the participant's authentic response. This ongoing process requires themes and connections to be checked and edited constantly. The process of clustering themes consists of staying close to the data. Hence, emerging themes are repeatedly compared to the particular responses, hence returning to the transcription back-and-forth verifying the themes and connections to the words of the participant.

The fourth step is to produce a table that will display the clusters of themes mostly relevant to the research topic. The table includes the names of the main themes found and the selected quotations that illustrate them. At this stage themes not suitable for the analysis structure or themes with limited evidence may be abandoned. (Smith et al., 2003, p. 72).

The fifth step is to move to the next transcript, analysing it following the aforementioned steps from the beginning, rather than building on the existing table. Thus, we ensure to be  aware of the new issues that may emerge (ibid., p. 73).

The sixth step aims to identify repeating patterns and themes that match across transcripts, in order to recognize similarities and differences in the statements of the participants.

Then the final step is related to writing a final statement based on the meanings recognised in the process of analysis of the participants' experience. As the writing process is closely linked to the process of analysis the themes are described in detail, providing quotations for illustration.

## 2.7 Ethical reflections

Through our research process, we have been deliberate about carrying out an ethical study, as our participants are assumed to be in an abnormal and vulnerable position as individuals who recently have fled war and potentially have experienced trauma. However it should be noted that one of our participants does not view herself as a refugee, this aspect will be further touched upon in Chapter II of the analysis. Brinkman and Kvale emphasise that the beneficial outputs for the participants of the study should be clear and should tip the balance when considering the potential risks the study could cause them (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 96). Having this in mind, we argue that this group becomes essential to study as it constitutes a new group of refugees in a Danish context. Therefore, the knowledge about this group is still limited. Considering the media and taking the political climate into account, there has been a very open and welcoming attitude towards Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion, compared to recent influxes of forced migrant groups (as described in the contextual background chapter). However, we are interested in how the reception of Ukrainian refugees plays out in practice, how the system is handling the influx seen from the Ukrainian refugee women's perspectives and which opportunities these high-skilled women have in Denmark in their professional lives and how they navigate within these new circumstances.

We will later in this section return to our macro ethical reflections, where we will also touch upon the possible benefits for our participants; nonetheless, we will first discuss our micro ethical considerations.

## 2.7.1 Micro-ethical Reflections

Regarding our micro-ethical considerations, it should be noted that we adhere to Brinkmann and Kvale's principle about being able to make *thick ethical descriptions* meaning to be able to judge the ethical needs in a specific situation rather than approaching the specific interview

setting with standardised rules taken from an ethical protocol (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 90). However, we have ensured several practices from the ethical conduct, which cannot be compromised.

We have secure that all of our potential participants have received the recruitment note, which aim was to provide them with information regarding: the initial purpose and scope of our thesis project, their right to withdraw from the project at any time and that all data gathered will be anonymised. On this basis, they could decide whether they were interested in participating or not. Furthermore, we have secured the informed consent for the interview either by recording it at the beginning of the interview or by getting it in a written, signed format (Ibid., p. 93-94). In this informed consent, we have notified our interviewees for their right to stop the interview at any time, for their right to object if there is anything they are not interested in answering as well as that they can withdraw from the project at any time if they do not wish to be a part it any longer. Additionally, we have informed our participants that the interview will be anonymised and we will not distribute any sensitive information disclosed. Moreover, our interviews have been notified that the recording and the non-anonymised version of the transcription will be deleted after finalising our thesis.

In terms of confidentiality and anonymity, Brinkmann and Kvale emphasise that it is crucial to involve the participants' opinion regarding to what extent personal information should be released (Ibid., p. 94-95). Therefore, we have asked our participants, if we could reveal their educational background and the occupation they had in Ukraine as well as what they are doing in Denmark now. We have chosen to ask them this because anonymising this information, could compromise the quality and findings of the study in terms of the focus on them utilising their potential in the Danish job market. Consequently, our participant Olga asked us not to anonymise her, whereas another participant did not feel comfortable sharing her educational background and occupation.
However, we have been deliberate about keeping any sensitive information confidential. Therefore, we have given our participants pseudonyms, as well as the persons occurring in their narratives. Furthermore, we have anonymised their age, the age of their children as well as their geographical affiliations in Ukraine and in Denmark, respectively.

Moreover, we have followed the principle of "do no harm" research in the interview setting, which is an ethical conduct that is seen as essential, especially within forced migration studies.

The principle of "do no harm" research should make the researcher reflect upon how to ask questions most sensitively and ethically to avoid making the participants even more vulnerable than they potentially already are (Krause, 2017, p. 3-4).

Therefore, while making the interview guide and before conducting an interview, we have discussed how to do this in the most ethical manner. We have been deliberate about not asking them their reasons for leaving Ukraine, and not asking them too much about their partners, family and friends In Ukraine because we view this as an aspect that could cause further emotional stress. Instead, we have focused on their settlement process in Denmark.

However, we have been aware from the beginning, based on experience, that it is hard not to touch upon some aspects of the traumas they have been through, because these can have a significant influence on their everyday lives. Therefore, we have been given space for this if our participants felt a need to share it without asking elaborative questions, respecting the fact that they have autonomy regarding their narrative and should control what they want to share.


### 2.7.2 Macro-Ethical Reflections


With regards to the macro-ethical reflections considered, we would like to employ Brinkmann and Kvale understanding, who argue that qualitative interviews should be contextualised in the social setting they are taking place and social practice they are a part of, as the empirical data from the interviews can result in a modification or formation of the context. Moreover, the results can supplement the status quo of the given social practice (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 354). Therefore, we have reflected on how our results could potentially affect the socio-political context in which our participants are situated. However, Krause stresses the importance of researchers not committing to promises, in relation to improvements of their participants' conditions, that they cannot keep (Krause, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, we also retain the option to disclaim that this study is on a thesis level, and consequently, it limits how much our participants will get out of our findings, in the long run.

According to Daphne Patai, reflecting on the consequences of a research is crucial, as there exists the possibility to put participants in a more marginalised position than they already are (Brinkmann, 2015, p. 475). Despite our participants finding themselves in a more privileged position in terms of being a part of a less contested refugee group compared with other groups, our findings demonstrate that they still face conditions in the Danish integration system that

have the potential to lead to their marginalisation. Therefore, we have been deliberate about following the principle of presenting our results in a way to keep them from entering the conversational circle in such a way that could be misunderstood. The conversational circle is a circle in which individuals exist, where one's understanding of the world reflects the knowledge we gather from conversations, and the comprehension of the meanings of the conversations is then again based on our conception of the social world we live within *(Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 354).* Considering this, we have been deliberate about presenting our results nuancedly so our participants do not seem ungrateful for the Danish state's effort to help them. The fact of not fulfilling this could potentially affect socio-political aspects, for example, affecting the positive public attitude we find currently, which could lead to a more contested position in society and, in the longer run, affect a tightening of the policies and laws surrounding them, leading to a more marginalised position in the Danish society.

## 2.8 Validity

In this paper, we have followed Joseph Maxwell's principles of validity with the aim to ensure the quality of our empirical findings. Additionally, we have adhered to his principle of *descriptive, interpretive* and *theoretical* validity. His principle of generalizability will be discussed in section 2.9 Limitations and bias.

Descriptive validity is about reproducing the interviews so they come as close to participants' original wording and meanings as possible (Maxwell, 2002, p. 45-48). We have ensured this by writing down the full transcription, including only a few omissions, so the coherence of the different sections remains. Moreover, we have noted important participants' reactions and emotions expressed during the interview, in order to comprehend the participant's entire perception of their lifeworld and to gain a more in-depth understanding of their subjective experiences.

Our aim, as researchers, in the process of transcription has been to stay as close as possible to the participants' phrasing. However, due to ethical reasons, we have occasionally changed the grammar or vocabulary to a certain extent, because of the contrasting levels of English fluency of our participants, in order to avoid potential impact on the accuracy and richness of the data collected. Also, to avoid potential bias and to ensure the integrity and validity of the research,

we have allowed sufficient time for our participants to understand the questions and form their responses.

Ensuring interpretative validity is vital in the phase of analysis, which means is to come as close to the meaning of participants' cognition, intention, evaluations of events etc. (Ibid., p. 48). Thus, following the steps of IPA, through an extensive data analysis strategy, we have compared and checked multiple times our interpretation with the exact content of our participants' responses.

Lastly, we have been concerned about the theoretical validity of the study, which is to choose applicable theoretical concepts that can open up the empirical findings to enrich the data. Furthermore, theoretical validity is also concerned with how the different theoretical concepts harmonise and fit each other (Ibid., p. 51). In addition, we have been deliberate about using an inductive approach, hence after coding the transcriptions, according to the IPA approach and comparing our findings from the different interviews, we have begun to discuss which theoretical concepts might be relevant.

## 2.9 Limitations and bias

In the following paragraph, we have addressed the possible limitations of the study in order to provide an in-depth outline of the validity and reliability of our research.

The subjectivity of the process is identified as a potential limitation of using IPA in research, meaning in both processes - data collection and analysis strategy, the researcher and the participant bring their own subjective interpretations, which respectively may lead to bias and subjectivity in the findings. Thus, in order to mitigate this bias, it is of utmost importance for us as researchers to be aware of our own subjective experiences and to take steps to minimize their influence on the data collection and analysis process. Hence, we have allowed flexibility in our conversations with all participants in order to follow up on interesting or unexpected responses from our interviewees and explore their experiences in more depth. Also, we have encouraged open-ended responses, by which the participants are able to share their experiences in their own words, accordingly to minimize the impact of bias on the data collection process.

Additionally, the findings of our research may have limited external validity due to their focus on the subjective experiences of a small number of participants. As this can make it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population, to address this limitation we have carefully considered our research question (Maxwell, 2002).

**2.10 Positioning**

As researchers, we acknowledge that it is important to be aware of our positioning in the context of this present study. Therefore, we have aimed to  continuously maintain this awareness along the  process of producing knowledge, in order to avoid biases, beliefs and personal experiences from affecting our empirical findings. Thus, we aim to ensure that our positioning in the research will not compromise the validity of our results (Berger, 2015, p. 220). Moreover, as coresearchers, we have adhered to the useful practises by regularly self-reflecting as well as discussing together about current positionings and their potential implications on our research, in order to secure reflexivity (ibid.,p. 231).

In addition, we acknowledge the crucial necessity to be aware that the secondary sources used to outline the context for our research may reflect the perspectives and interests of the authors, publishers, or funding organisations. Hence, in order to mitigate potential bias, we critically evaluated potential sources and considered alternative perspectives. Furthermore, by using primarily peer-reviewed resources, we aim to ensure that the findings of our research are based on credible and reliable sources. Multiple sources have been included, such as academic journals, peer-reviewed published literature, government reports, official publications and statements regarding the EU legal framework as well as the legal act, activated by the Danish state to ensure the protection of Ukrainian refugees.

**3. Theoretical framework**

**3.1 Theory of Recognition**

Axel Honneth's recognition theory (1995) emphasizes the importance of individual's social recognition in the development of one's self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.  We find

this theory particularly relevant when analyzing the dynamics of social integration and the impact of recognition on our participants' lives in Denmark.

In his seminal work "The Struggle for Recognition" published in 1995, Axel Honneth proposed a novel framework for understanding recognition forms by drawing on Hegel's early work. Honneth (1995) argued that the recognition of individuals in three distinct spheres, namely: love, rights and solidarity is essential for the formation of an individual's identity as well as the maintenance of a healthy and functioning modern society (Schmitz, 2019, p.3). Axel Honneth defines the issue of recognition as an intersubjective matter and he argues that "social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition" (Honneth, 1995, I)[1] and that it is through morally motivated struggles of social groups that societies change normatively (ibid.). According to Honneth, the most important aspects of recognition are relationships of care and love, which foster self-confidence, legal relationships and rights, which promote self-respect, and relations of solidarity, which lead to the development of self-esteem (Zurn, 2015, p.6). Furthermore, fostering all the aforementioned positive self-attitudes can help a person achieve self-worth. However, the lack of recognition in relationships with others could negatively impact their ability to govern themselves (Turtiainen 2018; Ikäheimo, 2003).

### 3.1.1 Love and self-confidence

Honneth (1995) explains that in order to comprehend the first aspect of an individual's recognition and development of self-confidence, the concept of 'love' must be understood in a neutral sense, as a primary relationship (e.g. friendship, parent-child relationship, romantic relationship) that is comprised of strong emotional bonds between a limited number of individuals (Honneth, 1995, I). He relates this concept with Hegel's formulation for whom "love represents the first stage of reciprocal recognition" (ibid.). It is argued that in the reciprocal experience when two individuals engage in a caring relationship, they both come to realize "to be united in their neediness, in their dependence on each other" (ibid.).

According to Honneth, the experience of being recognized by others in this relationship aspect is an essential element in the development of self-confidence as well as a perception of oneself

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[1] We will further cite Honneth's work by referring to the main heading of the three sections in the chapter, respectively: I, II or III, as the source lacks page numbers.

as a valuable and worthy individual. Honneth (1995) highlights that this fundamental level of emotional confidence that love helps generate, constitutes the psychological precondition for the development of all further attitudes of self-respect. In other words, when we are loved and recognized by someone else, we are more likely to believe in ourselves and develop positive attitudes toward ourselves. Furthermore, it is argued that love relationships enable mutual recognition and respect for each other's individuality and personal boundaries,  allowing each individual to experience a sense of validation which contributes to self-confidence, as one feels understood, accepted and valued. Moreover, Honneth (1995) defines the development of self-confidence as a fundament for morality which also facilitates the successful communication and participation of the individual in other social relations (Ghosh, 2008, p.91).

### 3.1.2 Rights and self-respect

In the sense of recognition of rights, Honneth notes that legal relations and love are different in many ways, but they are still connected by the same mechanism of reciprocal recognition. He draws on the arguments of Hegel and Mead from a legal perspective and argues that in order to understand individuals as bearers of rights, one must understand the normative obligations they have towards others, which can only happen once the perspective of "generalized other" is understood. That said, it is only by understanding the rights of others that one can understand themselves as a legal person and be sure that their claims will be met (Honneth. 1995, II). Furthermore, it is argued that "with the transition to modernity, individual rights have become detached from concrete role expectations, and must be ascribed to every human individual as a free being" (Honneth, 1995). This change in the character of legal recognition is described as the result of a historical process that submits legal relations to the requirements of post-conventional morality. The author suggests that in traditional legal relations, recognition of someone as a legal person is still tied to their social status and esteem, but that this linkage breaks down over time.

Respectively, legal recognition becomes separated from social esteem, leading to two different forms of respect which must be analyzed separately. Therefore, individuals are to be respected for both their rights and entitlements recognized from a legal perspective as well as for being autonomous in their everyday interactions (Turtiainen, 2018, p.191; Honneth, 1995). In this

sense, rights are not only legally recognized but also provide a moral basis for self-respect, as the recognition confirms individuals' agency and capability of making justifications (ibid.).

However, we must acknowledge that in the context of our research, the rights and privileges of refugees may differ significantly from those of legal citizens of the host country, in this case Denmark. This is due to the fact that refugees are not legally recognized as citizens and, as such, they do not have the same rights and protections under the law. Also, refugees' legal rights and recognition in this may vary depending on the political and social context.

The occurrence of disrespect in the form of structural exclusion of certain rights to an individual in a given society implies that the person is not considered "to possess the same degree of moral accountability as other members of society", hence the individual cannot maintain the societal norms for the functioning in the given society (Honneth, 1992, p. 191). This type of disrespect causes individuals to lose self-respect and the ability to see themselves as equal participants in interactions (ibid.). Honneth (1992) argues that it can also lead to a lack of recognition of cognitive respect for moral accountability, which is something that is typically acquired through socialization.

### 3.1.3 Solidarity and self-esteem

The concept of `self-esteem " is based on the recognition of the unique characteristics of individuals and their value for contribution and is related to the idea of societal solidarity (Honneth, 1995). Thus, as individuals gain recognition and respect for their abilities within a society, that helps them develop a more practical relationship with themselves referred as "social esteem". Honneth (1995) notes that for modern societies to function justly, individuals must view each other as equals and value each other's abilities and traits.

> *In modem societies, therefore, social relations of symmetrical esteem between individualized (and autonomous) subjects represent a prerequisite for solidarity. In this sense, to esteem one another symmetrically means to view one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis* (Honneth, 1995).

Furthermore, the development of self-esteem represents a crucial aspect in the formation of individuals' sense of self and their perceived value in society. It is argued that without a sense of self-worth, individuals may struggle to fully develop their identity and find meaning in their contributions to society. Additionally, Honneth (1995) acknowledges the challenges that arise in maintaining self-esteem in societies that are pluralistic and characterized by mobility. Moreover, in a forced migration context, due to the fact that individuals may face systematic denigration from external groups, which can have a detrimental impact on their self-esteem and sense of worth. It is also suggested that this can be a prevalent issue in such societies and can impede the development of self-esteem (Thomas, 2010, p.12; Honneth, 1995).

**3.1.4 Relevance**

Honneth's theory of recognition posits that individuals have a fundamental need to be recognized and validated by others in order to feel a sense of self-worth. It can be stated that the achievement and maintenance of self-realisation are dependent on the ability to attain and provide recognition through interactions with others, thus emphasizing the importance of an intersubjective approach to recognition (Thomas, 2010, p. 11). Therefore, we employ this theoretical perspective in order to understand how the recognition or the lack of it influences Ukrainian refugees' perceptions and struggles in Denmark while navigating their new environment. We have found it relevant to use the aspects of recognition that Honneth defines, in order to investigate if Ukrainian refugees' are recognized by the Danish society and the Danish state and how that shapes their integration and sense of belonging. Applied to the experience of refugees, Honneth's theory of recognition can provide a framework for understanding how the denial of recognition and validation can cause social struggles and challenges.

**3.2 Aspirations-capabilities in a forced migration context**

In comprehending how our participants navigate their level of recognition in the Danish society, an important aspect becomes understanding the aspirations they bring with them in the first place. This becomes relevant because examining their aspirations and their capacity to aspire can also give us an inside into how they navigate as they do and how this affects their settlement and integration process in Denmark.

Moreover, it becomes interesting to unfold how the participants exercise agency in relation to how they resist or find their way within the new system of rules integrating in Denmark, to hold on to their aspirations, which is the case for most of the women we interviewed.

In order to get the most comprehensive theoretical framework, for understanding aspirations as a theoretical concept, we will now touch upon the scholarly work of Hein de Haas, Arjun Appadurai and Nina Gren, whom all have contributed to this academic field, concerned about refugees' agency and their ability to navigate within their new circumstances.

### 3.2.1 Hein de Haas - the aspiration capabilities framework

De Haas (2021) views the theoretical framework of aspirations-capabilities as an approach to break with functionalist and historical-structural theories, which do not consider individual agency when mainly studying push and pull factors and means-to-an-end perspectives. However, he acknowledges that these theoretical perceptions can be beneficial if one uses them simultaneously with insights about how the agency unfolds in a migration setting. Thus, it is possible to comprehend the migration experience while paying attention to how societal structures affect this process (de Haas, 2021, pp. 2-3, 8-9 & 14-15).

De Haas recognises that the theoretical notion of aspirations is predominantly used in migration studies, and the focus on aspirations is often to explain why people migrate. Therefore, the theories usually do not grasp how agency in terms of aspirations evolves when looking at a forced migration context. He wants to break with this dichotomous understanding between migrants and refugees and argues that refugees would not be able to flee in the first stance if they did not possess agency to some extent. Instead, he views the refugees as agents who, to the most significant extent, will try to employ their agency even when they face hardship. Therefore, he advocates for a meta-conceptual framework that acknowledges that migrants and refugees equally encounter constraints, where the agency in the figure of aspirations becomes significant to examine (de Haas, 2021, p. 16).

By emphasising findings from other studies concerning migration, de Haas argues that agency is not only relevant to describe the reasons for migration and the agency that unfolds during the journey/flight, but it also becomes crucial to comprehend how their agency can shape "networks, new identities, establishing communities and their own economic structures*"* in the receiving society (de Haas, 2021 p. 8).

Furthermore, to understand how migrants and refugees exercise their agency within structural constraints, he argues that one needs to get an insight into the subjective realm, which means

understanding an individual's migration aspirations. Studying these aspirations gives the researcher an idea of the agent's overall life preferences and their understanding of opportunities in potential receiving countries. Here culture, education, personal disposition, identification etc., play an essential role in shaping these preferences and understandings (Ibid., pp. 17-18 & 30).

Studying this insight is related to Appadurai's theoretical notion of the "capacity to aspire" (Ibid., p. 18), where the factors mentioned above can affect migrants' and refugees' capability to formulate and exercise these aspirations. Therefore, we will now proceed with accounting for Appadurai's insights when it comes to a comprehension of aspirations.

### 3.2.2 Arjun Appadurai - The Capacity to Aspire

Appadurai's ambition in contributing to the theoretical framework regarding aspirations, when accounting for the importance of the capacity to aspire, is to create a political focus on why it is crucial to strengthen culture as a capacity. Furthermore, he intends to create awareness of how this is done in concrete ways (Appadurai, 2004, p. 59). Appadurai argues that the strengthening of the cultural aspect in a society becomes essential because: " it is in culture that ideas of the future, as much of those about the past, are embedded and nurtured" (Ibid.). In this way, culture becomes a synonym for development. Appadurai stresses that more political attention to this aspect can reduce poverty and be a strategy to empower the "poor" (Appadurai, 2004, pp. 59 & 64).

Appadurai describes the poor as refugees, migrants, minorities, slum dwellers etc. (Ibid., p. 81). However, we acknowledge that our participants are not poor in a classical economic sense, as they are all highly skilled. Nonetheless, they find themselves in a position where they risk being downgraded, because of their refugee status. Therefore, it becomes interesting how Denmark, as the receiving society, supports the cultural capacities they already possess in the most optimal sense.

Being able to support these cultural capacities, the question of recognition becomes relevant. Appadurai emphasises Charles Taylor's concept of political recognition relating to the ethical debate of multiculturalism. Taylor stresses the importance that intercultural understanding should not be an optional aspect but should instead be an obligatory principle. Consequently, this can lead the way for a higher level of dignity regarding cross-cultural transactions instead of reducing everything to the question of redistribution (Ibid., p. 62).

When examining the level of recognition, it also becomes necessary to emphasise the conditions and constraints of refugees' social realities and, on this basis, how they negotiate the norms they are facing (Ibid., p. 66). In relation to this, Appadurai stresses the importance of acknowledging that there is not equal access to the capacity to aspire because it is the individuals in society who possess the most power, dignity and material resources who have the best chances of doing so. Thus, the powerful in society, according to Appadurai, have an understanding of how to navigate with means and ends, an understanding of outcomes of aspirations, and they find themselves in a position where they are more able to explore and try new aspects of life etc. (Appadurai, 2004, p.68). Hereby, the capacity to aspire becomes a matter of a navigational capacity, where the less privileged are situated in a less favourable position in the attempt to navigate their respective social contexts (Ibid., p. 69). Within the social setting of our participants this also becomes an interesting aspect to examine as they in some cases, find themselves in a downgraded position being labeled as a refugee.

However, as researchers, we are interested in examining the manner in which Ukrainian refugees navigate and pursue their aspirations within Danish society, utilizing their prior experiences and perspectives gathered from their relatively privileged position in Ukraine, with regards to their skills.

In the conclusion of the chapter Appadurai highlight his idea for the outcome by giving more academic attention to the capacity to aspire:

> *"By bringing the future back in, by looking at aspirations as cultural capacities, we are surely in a better position to understand how people actually navigate their social spaces" (Appadurai. 2004, p. 84).*

This perspective, as Appadurai argues, can improve the relationship between democracy and development and establish a better foundation for supporting people in marginalised positions to strengthen their ability to aspire in an empowering sense (Appadurai. 2004, p. 84).

### 3.2.3 Nina Gren - Living Bureaucratisation

Nina Gren's (2020) case study of how young Palestinian male refugees in Sweden navigate their integration process, through their aspirations is an example of how the receiving country and its integration framework affect the capacity to aspire. According to her empirical findings, the Swedish official introductory programme for refugees is characterised by a standardised bureaucratisation that lacks the space for pursuing individualised aspirations. Consequently, this has led to frustration among her participants because of the bureaucratisation of their everyday lives, which limits their agency and autonomy to decide their own future, jeopardising their upward social mobility (Gren, 2020, pp. 161, 165, 172 & 175).

Gren stresses that within the Swedish integration system exists a bureaucratic labelling of being a refugee. In her case study, she finds that being a refugee gives connotations to emergency, victimhood and passivity. Furthermore, her findings indicate that on an institutional level, an embedded understanding exists of refugees being low educated with limited ambitions. Gren views this understanding as a contradiction to the initial ideology of integration (Ibid., pp. 162, 165 & 175).

Gren emphasises the importance of applying Appadurai's understanding of the capacity to aspire, when studying refugees' experiences in host societies. However, she is critical towards if the refugee's aspirations can coexist with the procedures one finds in the bureaucratised integration programmes. Her findings show that this limited space for pursuing one's aspirations can have different outcomes. It can lead to resistance in how the refugees find their way around (intended/non-intended), not following the requirements expected of them to be loyal to their aspirations. However, this structural limitation can also cause hopelessness or a re-evaluation of one's aspirations resulting in being less ambitious (Gren, 2020, pp. 161-162). Given these findings, Gren concludes that there is a lack of motivation in the Swedish bureaucratic integration context to realise refugees' aspirations and use the resources they bring with themselves (Ibid., p. 165). This point also relates to our findings, where several participants accounted for their experience at the job centre. The only option they got introduced to was mismatching job opportunities, despite being highly skilled.

### 3.2.4 Concluding remarks on the theoretical concept of aspirations-capabilities

We have chosen the theoretical concept of aspirations-capabilities because it can capture how our participants navigate their integration in Denmark through their respective aspirations. This is a research area that de Haas, as already mentioned, views to have received limited attention.

Moreover, Borselli and Van Meijl argue that the more agency-focused approach has been overlooked by a more structural approach (Borselli & Van Meijl, 2020: p. 579). However, it is significant to stress that we are still focusing on how the structural constraints (Ibid., p. 580) in the figure of the Danish bureaucratised integration system, affect our participants' aspirations and how this influences their settlement and integration process.

### 3.3 Bourdieu's notion of forms of capital in a forced migration context

In order to understand our participants' aspirations and how they navigate the Danish receiving society, it becomes crucial to understand the subjective realm as emphasised by de Haas. This mentioned, Bourdieu can provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of how culture affects life preferences through his theoretical framework of different forms of capital and how these capitals together create social positionings in the "social space" – also referred to as "classes". Moreover, class positionings become relevant in a forced migration context since it also affects how refugees resist and negotiate their identities in their new social setting within the receiving society.

### 3.3.1 Transforming and negotiating the convertibility of capitals – applying the class concept in a forced migration context:

Class in a forced migration context has been academically neglected because, as Hunkler et al. (2022) emphasise, refugees have often been viewed as classless. Thus, factors such as ethnicity, race, religion and gender have dominated when investigating the risk of their marginalisation. However, Hunkler et al. argue that the framework of class can help one to understand refugees' "spatial and social (im) mobility" (Hunkler et al., 2022, pp. 1-2) by studying how forced migrants manage to transfer or convert their capitals obtained in the country of origin (ibid., pp. 1-2).

However, we acknowledge that aspects such as ethnicity, race, religion and gender, together with class, still play a significant role in understanding the complexity of a refugee's positioning in the receiving society (Ibid., p. 6 & Erel, 2010, p. 643), because this intersection as Erel argues: "influences how social and cultural capital can be mobilized" (Erel, 2010, p. 650). However, we should ephasise that this study does not extensively focus on these intersectional factors, as the female refugees we interviewed feel, to a large extent, recognised

by the society based on these intersecting parameters. However, it becomes interesting to study how they navigate the obstacles they face in their settlement and integration process, despite experiencing social solidarity in their surrounding environment in the Danish society.

We find Erel's academic work with cultural and social capital in a migration context relevant because she contests the classical understanding of *the* "rucksack approach", which is the point of departure for Human and Ethnic capital approaches when developing their theoretical framework. She criticises these approaches for taking the "cultural stuff" for granted; instead, she argues that the vital aspect is to study how the resources accumulated in their home country become convertible in their destination country (Ibid., pp. 645-646). However, she emphasises a Bourdieusian approach, which proposes a more comprehensive account of how the interactions of different capitals become convertible into other forms of capital (Erel, 2010, pp. 646-647).

Erel stresses the importance of the focus on this convertibility and transformability of cultural capital when using Bourdieu's framework in a migration context; she argues:

> "[…] *that migration results in new ways of producing and re-producing (mobilizing, enacting, validating) cultural capital that builds on, rather than simply mirrors, power relations of either the country of origin or the country of migration. Migrants create the mechanism of validation for their cultural capital, negotiating both ethnic majority and migrant institutions and networks*" (Ibid., p. 642).

In this way, it becomes essential to keep in mind that migration is not a linear reproduction of cultural capital; instead, one has to study what means migrants use to legitimise their cultural resources into capital and how this recognition is affected by the other forms of capital they draw on (Ibid., pp. 647-648).

Furthermore, by emphasising Bourdieu & Wacquant's (2007) work, Erel stresses that this process should be viewed in the light of an individual's social trajectory when it comes to how one navigate their position-taking, meaning how the individuals manoeuvre to apply their capitals in a strategical sense (Erel, 2010, p. 647). Therefore, when looking at how migrants strategise the validation of their cultural capital in the receiving country, it is not only significant to look out for how their capital is optimised but also to keep in mind the way they

strategise (Erel, 2010, p. 647) how "to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 99). Following this point of Bourdieu and Wacquant, the researcher should investigate how migrants by using their agency, create cultural capital in innovative ways and the methods they practice validation while simultaneously having in mind how the local, national and transnational contexts affect this process (Erel, 2010, p. 649 & 656).

### 3.3.2 Bourdieu's notion of the social space and the different forms of capital

Bourdieu has developed the notion of social space, habitus, different forms of capital and symbolic power to understand stratification in societies. An individual's positioning in society (or in the social space), can explain the distinctions one sees in society, which are determined by an individual's assets of capitals and how these are combined. Bourdieu views these distinctions in a relational sense - the form of an individual's different combinations of capital merely gets discernable in the social space when comparing them with other individuals' assortment of capitals – thereby, these various combinations and their positionings in relation to each other constitute different classes.  The classes' tastes, different behaviour and perceptions of life are determined by a habitus. Thus, one can comprehend the correspondence between individuals having the same taste when placed in a similar class position (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 6-8). Bourdieu stresses that these classes should be seen as a social construct (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17), because the only thing that is observable is how the positionings differentiate from each other in the social space (Bourdieu, 1998, p.  12).

Bourdieu (1986) differentiates between four different assets of capitals: cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989).
In this context, our research will focus mainly on the cultural and social capital assets and how these are transformed in their new social space in Denmark.
Bourdieu stresses that cultural capital occurs in three different states: the embodied, the objectified and the institutionalised state (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). The embodied state of cultural capital is connected to the embodiment of how an individual is cultivated and the level of an individual's assimilation into society. These inculcations take time and require personal investment. Moreover, Bourdieu views this process of embodiment as the core of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1986,  pp. 244-245). The objectified state of cultural capital should be understood as an individual's possession of physical objects such as paintings, books, instruments (Ibid.,

247 ). He views these objects to be the materialised markers of class. *The institutionalised state of cultural capital* is an individual's asset of academic qualification that represents a *certificate of cultural competence*. Bourdieu also stresses that it becomes possible to measure the value of a given academic qualification. Moreover, this certificate has a legally guaranteed autonomous value depending on the cultural context (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 247-248). Accordingly, the valuation of qualifications is contextually bound, meaning that academic qualifications obtained in one educational market risk being devalued in another (Ibid., 255), which has different academic orientations.

Another form of capital is what Bourdieu defines as social capital, which is the obtainment of the resources found in an individual's social network or in one's group membership. This social network or group membership can unfold itself ranging from an institutionalised relationship, such as being part of a school class, a formal relationship being part of a workplace, or an informal relationship, being part of a family (Ibid., pp. 248-249). Moreover, group membership can also be understood to be on a more macro-level state, such as the feeling of belonging to one's surrounding society (Ibid., p. 251). Being a member of a group, according to Bourdieu, may create a *collectively-owned capital*, where the individual, through recognition, achieves a form of credential ability. These relationships are nurtured and enacted through practical, material or more symbolic exchanges (Bourdieu, 1989, pp. 248-249).

*Economic capital* is only an aspect we will touch upon to a limited extent; however, as we will see in the analysis, it does affect how some of our participants navigate their settlement processes and migration trajectories. According to Bourdieu, economic capital refers to what an individual possesses that can be converted into currency and is, for example, institutionalised in owning real estate (Ibid., p. 243).

Lastly, *symbolic capital* should be understood in relation to which extent the various forms of capital are recognised as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17). However, it can also take a more institutionalised form, such as having a title or a prestigious job position, which is regarded by the surrounding society as being of status (Ibid., p. 21).

It is argued that the aforementioned forms of capital are interconnected, meaning that one form of capital can be converted into another form of capital; for example, cultural capital, with the right means, can be converted into economic capital, whereas social capital depending on the proper circumstances can be converted into an extended level of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). This convertibility, as Erel (2010) argues, becomes relevant when studying how migrants in their new social reality in the receiving country manage to convert their different

capital assets into other and new combinations of capitals, which depends on the degree they manage to validate these.

The refugees' validation process of capital is connected to Bourdieu's notion of *symbolic power*.
He stresses that an individual's class position and recognition in society are affected by the level of symbolic power, which is determined by the extent of an individual's asset of symbolic capital. The obtainment of symbolic power is relevant to what he defines as the symbolic struggle, whereas a high level of symbolic power gives the individual an advantage in deciding the legitimate style of living (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21).

**3.4 Social identity theory**

Richard Jenkins' (2014) Social Identity theory was selected for our conceptual framework as it helps us to further explain how the participants make sense of and negotiate their identities while settling in Denmark. Also, it provides an in-depth understanding of the complexities of our participants' subjective experiences and how these shape their sense of self as well as their perceptions in relation to their positioning within the Danish society.

Social identity theory (SIT) as proposed by Richard Jenkins (2014) posits that individuals define their identities based on their membership in various social groups and that the perceived salience of these group memberships can change in different contexts. Additionally, the formation and understanding of one's identity is not limited to personal experiences and interactions but is also shaped by collective and historical factors. Jenkins argues that the matter of identity, both as one's own personal understanding of self as well as how they are perceived by others, holds significant importance (Jenkins 2014, p.4). Therefore, he defines that 'identity' at its core is the ability "rooted in language" for individuals to know and understand themselves and others. Identity is a multi-faceted process of categorising and understanding one's place in the world, both as an individual and as a member of a group (ibid., p.6).

Social identity theory explains how people classify themselves and others into different groups based on shared characteristics, and that this classification leads to the development of social identities, which in turn influence how individuals think, feel, and behave. Jenkins further

clarifies that classification is not neutral and often implies evaluation, and that hierarchies of classification exist both cognitively and socially, leading to conflicts and complexities in how individuals interact with others.

### 3.4.1. The process of identification

Jenkins (2014) refers to identity as a process of "identification that makes no sense outside relationships, whether between individuals or groups" (Jenkins, 2014, p.6). Additionally, it is argued that:

" [...]*identification* matters because it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively. This is a 'baseline' sorting that is fundamental to the organisation of the human world: it is how we know *who's who* and *what's what [...]*" (Jenkins, 2014, p.14)

Moreover, identification is not to be understood as a one-way process, but rather it is reciprocal and mutually dependent on both the classifier and the classified. It is defined that the dynamic process of identification of oneself or others is a process of assigning meaning that is inherently social in nature. Thus, identification process involves the shaping, negotiation and communication of identity, while adhering to conventions as well as novel ways of "being" and "becoming" (ibid., p.18). Hence, Jenkins also argues that the term "social" is redundant as meaning is always created through social interactions. Moreover, the motives for behavior are interconnected, however, the classificatory models of self and others are multidimensional and rather inconsistent (Jenkins, 2014, p.6).

In that sense, we have decided to employ Jenkins' notions (2014) to understand how various factors influence the identities of the Ukrainian female refugees who participated in our research, and how they have been shaping and negotiating their identities over time through their social interactions in Denmark. We find it relevant to apply SIT to the forced migration context, as for refugees, the process of identification can be particularly complex as they are forced to leave behind their familiar social groups and must navigate new ones in their host country.

### 3.4.2 Three distinct orders of identification

Jenkins (2014; 2003) introduces an individualist approach to studying identity and the intersubjective everyday realities of individuals. He employs the ides of "pragmatic individualism" (Jenkins, 2014, 41) suggesting that this concept is fundamental for understanding individuals in the context of their own life. This approach is seen as a prerequisite for the sociological imagination, which is the ability to understand the connections between individual experiences and larger social structures (ibid.). Furthermore, drawing on Erving Goffman and Anthony Giddnes work, Jenkins suggests:

> "*[...] that the world as constructed and experienced by humans can be best understood as three distinct 'orders': the individual order is the human world as made up of embodied individuals, and what-goes-on-in-their-heads; the interaction order is the human world as constituted in relationships between individuals, in what-goes-on-between-people; the institutional order is the human world of pattern and organisation, of established-ways-of-doing-things.* " (Jenkins, 2014; pp.41,42)

These three orders are interconnected and mutually dependent on each other. The individual order shapes the way individuals think and behave, the interaction order shapes the way individuals interact with others, and the institutional order shapes the way individuals interact within the context of social structures and norms. Understanding identification, according to Jenkins, requires a holistic perspective that takes into account all three orders.

Firstly, in relation to the identification process based on these orders, we acknowledge that as refugees may have to navigate their own thoughts and feelings about their displacement, their past experiences, and their future aspirations as well as face emotions such as fear, uncertainty, and hope. Thus, the individual order can provide insight into the subjective experiences of refugees and how they navigate their settlement process in Denmark. Secondly, in this context we find the interactional order relevant as it can allow us to to examine how refugees make sense of the social interactions they encounter with members of receiving society. Hence, including how they navigate language barriers, cultural differences, and prejudice, as well as how they form new relationships and connections with people from the host community. Thirdly, we claim that the institutional order can provide insight into the challenges and

opportunities that refugees face as they navigate their new host country and how they interact within the context of social structures and norms, with regards to dealing with different laws and regulations, access new services, and navigating the bureaucracies of different institutions.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Chapter I: Solidarity and rights in the Danish Context: An exploration of Ukrainian female refugees' experience

The central concern of the first chapter of the analysis is to provide understanding of our participants' experience in relation to their level of recognition within the social and legal Danish context, by primarily employing Axel Honneth's notions of his Theory of Recognition (1995). We aim to shed light on the perceptions of Ukrainian female refugees in Denmark and how they experience their reception in the Danish host society. Honneth's Theory of Recognition provides a framework for examining how recognition, or the lack thereof, affects the subjective experiences of our interviewees. In this analysis chapter, we investigate what are the implications of the legal and societal recognition and how these influence the sense of belonging of refugees in Denmark as well as their settlement process.

### 4.1.1 Connected and Supported: Examining the role of solidarity

Conducting our interviews a recurring common theme has been identified as a crucial element of our interviewees' perceptions of their life in Denmark, which is their positive experience interacting with Danish society. To illustrate, Irina is in her early 40s, she was living in the northern part of Ukraine when the war started and one week later at the beginning of March, she decided to leave Ukraine and go to a friend of hers living in Denmark, together with her little daughter only, as her husband was not allowed to exit Ukraine because of the martial law. Their journey has been very difficult since they first had to stay for one night in Poland and after that, two volunteers drove her and her daughter all the way to Denmark by car. Subsequently, Irina stayed with a Danish family living in a small city in northern Denmark. Throughout the interview, Irina emphasised the positive feelings and the gratitude she feels for her reception in the Danish society. According to her:

> *"But it was a very good experience they.. Umm, we felt ourselves like it was like our home and like our parents, yeah. [...] Because at first we didn't have any money and we didn't have any help because we waited for documents. You know, the special documents and they gave us everything: food, home, and some money for candies for*

*my daughter, for something else and their friends, also gave us some clothes because… because at first, I thought that we come only for one or two weeks."* (Irina, lines: 40-47).

This statement highlights how Irina experienced a high level of acceptance and support from the Danish family that hosted her and her daughter. Hence, the reception they were welcomed with can be understood as a form of recognition that addresses the third aspect of Honneth's theory (1995) connected to solidarity and membership. The societal solidarity expressed through the help provided by the Danish host society has been essential for Irina to establish a sense of belonging and connection to the community as well. The received support has profoundly influenced her feelings towards Denmark and enhanced her sense of feeling like *"home"*, despite the uncertainty in relation to her failed expectations that they will only stay for a short period of time.

The same perception is shared by our participant Olga, who is 50 years old and fled to Denmark with her 11 years old daughter Yana. Before the war started, Olga had a feeling that something might happen because of the Russian troops that had surrounded Ukraine and the news spread around, because of that she had bought plane tickets for the west part of Ukraine for the 24th of February, which happened to be just the first day of the actual war. Therefore, Olga and her daughter flew to western Ukraine, where they stayed with a friend in Lviv (a city very close to the Ukrainian-Polish border). One day after that, they left for Poland and it took them 15 hours only to cross the border, but after staying in Poland for a while, Olga figured that more and more Ukrainians are arriving there as well, and she decided to go further. Therefore, through her social network, she received information about Denmark and a family that can host her and her daughter. As a result, at the beginning of March, they arrived in Denmark. Similar to Irina, Olga and her daughter were also hosted by a Danish family who took care of them and provided them with a place to live, she explains: *"they are really nice and they are really open and they gave us a room and a bed and they are very polite – not to interfere with our privacy. So if we need something we could ask them"* (Olga, l. 254-256).

 Moreover, Olga describes the reception by the Danish society and Danish people:

> *"Danish people are very very nice, they are polite and with good manners and open to help and they don't have any.. we are not expecting something bad from them, they are*

*nice. And we feel very, very relaxed now because we don't feel danger here - only positive expectations.”*

She acknowledges the good treatment they received from Danish people as well as that their needs were met and she felt supported. From what she has experienced, she does not expect anything bad from Danish people, on the contrary, Olga shows the sense of trust and confidence she has developed towards the Danish society. Respectively, Honneth emphasises the mutual participation and symmetrical appreciation as a key elements to solidarity, which is also the way Irina and Olga are experiencing recognition from the Danish society. Another important notion of Olga's words is the feeling of security the Danish society has provided to her as well as the gratitude she has for Danish people who help and understand them:

> *“I would thank Denmark for accepting my family, me and my daughter, and to the people who have tried to make me feel not lost. And to try to be understanding - to try to understand and try to help and take care of me [...] and then I'm thankful that people are good and do not push us out or do not ignore us. Everyone is involved and wants to help and.. Um, I really see that Denmark is a country of possibilities because I also communicate with my friends from other countries and their situation is not so easy for them, but here you feel support from everyone”* (Olga, l. 677-684).

According to Olga, society's willingness to help was also a factor of an utmost significance for her to overcome the feeling that she is lost and to find a direction and purpose within this new and unknown environment, which she now perceives as *“a country of possibilities”*. Moreover, she felt understood which symbolises the personal differences and unique qualities that have been recognised through the expression of understanding, help, and care that the host society has demonstrated. In that sense, Honneth's theory of recognition is relevant to understand both our participant's experiences and the high level of recognition deriving from their social membership and solidarity within Danish society, which contributes to their positive perception of their lives in Denmark.

The supportive reception by the Danish society based on the story of our interviewee - Eva, is described likewise. Eva is in her 40s, she has four children and has two higher educations. She fled Ukraine together with her children, her father and her husband, whom the Ukrainian authorities allowed to leave the country because of their large family. Eva and her family did

not think where to go, they were only driving without any plans, only aiming for *rescuing the lives of their children (Eva, l. 122-123).* They were driving across Europe when they made it to Denmark and decided to stay longer. Consequently, they were hosted by a Danish family of farmers who let them live in their house and took care of Eva and her family. Eva explains her encounter with the Danish society and the solidarity:

> *"As we came almost without clothes and fully without money, only with ourselves. A lot of people – neighbours, a lot of people also living not far from the place where we live – they came and brought us some things. Used things from their children and also the Red Cross shop, they gave Ukrainians the possibility to go and take things for free for two months and it helped us so much." (Eva, l. 87-91)*

Eva has received a lot of help from the local community that supported them with free clothes and goods, so they can settle easier. Moreover, she also explains that even though the time "*is not good*" for her and her family, they are happy to be in Denmark and they view themselves "*in a friendly environment*" (Eva, l. 149-152). She also states that:

> *"[...] We like every Danish person who we meet because we really enjoy talking to you and having a time with and building relations with Danish people. I was surprised that the value of it was so high [...]"* (Eva, l. 135-137).

Based on Eva's experience, the importance of social interactions and relationships is highlighted. In that sense, building relationships with Danish people allows for the development of a shared framework of orientation, which can facilitate mutual recognition and appreciation of the unique qualities of individuals (Honneth, 1995, II). This recognition and appreciation can contribute to a sense of belonging and self-worth within the society, as stated in the quote. Furthermore, it is implied that Eva was positively surprised by the high value placed on building relationships with Danish people, which put emphasis on the importance of social interactions in our participant's settlement process (ibid.). According to Honneth, social esteem, or recognition within a society can exists through a symbolically articulated framework of orientation at the societal level, made up of ethical values and goals. This framework serves as a system of reference for evaluating and determining their social worth. According to Eva and her interactions with the Danish society she notes:

*"I don't feel any huge difference between my family and Danish families, because the way we think and the way our culture is built and also how we build friendship, also the work and everything. I just don't feel any difference. Maybe it is only about my family because I know some Ukrainians experience some problems, but about me I feel very very comfortable."* (Eva, l. 238-241).

Hence, Eva argues that she identifies with the Danish people in the context of culture and building friendships. Although, she acknowledges that this is her own subjective experience, based on her own identity and perception of life. Eva has not experienced any feelings of disrespect or alienation in her interactions with individuals of the Danish society. This reminds of Honneth's idea, which he defines as a 'symmetrical relationship', when individuals are able to perceive themselves as valuable to society through their capacities, hence being recognised. This suggests that the competition for gaining social recognition is lessened, as our interviewee through her social interactions, has experienced the Danish society as a harmonious and inclusive solidaric space (Honneth, 1995, III).

We continue with the story of our interviewee Julija. She is in her 40s and comes from a big city in Northeast Ukraine. Julija notes that all of her life has been devoted to art. She has studied in an art school, after which she graduates with a degree of arts in academia. In Ukraine she has been working as an artist, and was also an art teacher at her own art school. Julija has travelled a lot around the world, but has always lived in Ukraine. In March, few weeks after the war started, she fled Ukraine with her son, her mother and four dogs, who she describes as an integral part of their family. However, her husband had to stay in Ukraine because of the martial law. Julija describes their journey as one filled with uncertainty and danger, but also with the help of kind and compassionate people. Their journey starts around three weeks after the war started. Despite the chaos and violence in their hometown, she and her family are able to find refuge in the city of Lviv, which is located near the border of Poland. However, even this safe haven is not immune to danger, as the city begins to be bombed. It is through the help of a friend on Facebook that Julija finds a way out of the war-torn country and they make their way to Denmark. Despite the challenges they faced, she is grateful for the help they received along the way and the kindness of the people they met.

Overall, Julija perceives herself very lucky, because she meets a lot of nice people in Denmark as well, who help and provide support for her and her family, whom she defines as

*"superheroes"*(Julija, l. 8-10). Julija states that she loves Denmark and feels comfortable in this country (Julija, l. 124). When asked about her experience with the Danish society, Julija describes: *"Wonderful, I had an exhibition in Denmark because people saw what I do, and said: "Hey, you need to do something!". So I connect very easily with people, so it's so nice."* (Julija, l. 160-161). Julija explains the supportive societal solidarity towards her and her family, but also specifies how people who she met in Denmark when settled here, encouraged her to do something with her talents and skills. Hence, Danish society, by acknowledging her individual value and work as an artist, has helped her reinforce her self-realisation, by showcasing her talent to a wider audience, creating an exhibition, also contributing to the society she is in.

**4.1.2. Building Support Systems: Understanding the role of close connections**

Based on Honneth's first aspect of recognition, "love and care," this passage provides a glimpse into the personal accounts of our interviewees and the establishment of close friendships, while adapting to a new culture and society. We examine the ways in which these individuals form connections and relationships with others in their new surroundings, and how these relationships shape their experiences of integration. Overall, the passage highlights the importance of social connections and support in the process of adapting to a new society.

Based on our participants stories, we have found the establishment of close relationship as essential part of some of our refugees' lives in Denmark. To illustrate, Julija emphasised her friendship with a Danish woman named Marianne. They met each other when Marianne was volunteering in the house where Julija lives. According to Julija:

> *[...] she and her husband are such nice people and in the morning we need to have a cup of coffee or something" [...] So these wonderful people help me to be in "right now, right here", feeling what is happening now, over a coffee or a bottle of water or see the ocean or something, [doubt]. So it does not matter, they help me understand what is happening now. [...]* (Julija, l. 325-330)

Here, this is relevant to Honneth's first aspect of recognition, as it highlights the role of this "primary relationship" (Honneth, 1995, I) in this case in the form of friendship and its significant meaning to Julija's life in Denmark. Namely, this connection helps her to be present

in the moment and to experience her life in a more authentic and grounded way. Despite the fact that Julija explains how: *"[...] all the time, in my feelings I return to my place, so I can normally.. In Ukraine.. [...]"* (Julija, l. 126), her Danish friend is an essential part of her new reality, as it is one of the little shared moments that help her to be fully present in the moment and to feel like she belongs. This is in line with Honneth's notion (1995) that loving and caring relationships are built on strong emotional attachments and that the act of boundary-dissolution, in which two people feel united and reconciled, can help individuals to reinforce one's self-confidence and one's ability to navigate their own subjective reality. In that sense, this friendship, as assurance gives Julija "the strength to open up to himself or herself in a relaxed relation-to-self" (Honneth, 1995, I) and be present in her surroundings.

We will now proceed with the experience of our participant Maria. She is in her 40s and together with her mother, sister, nephew and their dog, fled Ukraine in March searching safety and security. Her husband, whom she was together with for over 10 years remained in Ukraine. Moving to Denmark, Maria and her family were welcomed and accommodated by distant relatives who have lived in Denmark for 40 years. However, they stay was temporary as Maria's nephew is a child with special needs and due to various circumstances they had to find a new private place to live, which presented difficulty. In Ukraine, Maria is a specialist in the sphere of project-coordination for NGOs. In the summer, Maria's family decided to go back to Ukraine and leave Denmark. Nonetheless, Maria at that time received a job offer matching her skills, in a big international Danish company, which she decides to accept. Despite the hard decision, Maria is currently working full-time and thus, supporting her family in Ukraine.

In general, Maria describes that she and her family feel welcome within the Danish society and have been provided with a lot of support (Maria, l. 378-380). However, she claims to be struggling with building close connections in her working environment and her daily interactions with Danish colleagues. She presumes that this is a result of cultural differences of how Ukrainians and Danes build friendships:

> *"I have my colleagues, but how to describe, hmmm... The feeling is that everyone is extremely friendly and very supportive, but it's very hard to actually become friends with them, like close friends because in Ukraine, if we work together and if we like each other, if we have a good work relationship, most probably we would become friends and we will go somewhere after work or we'll travel together somewhere. So step by*

*step. After several months of working together, we could call each other friends, so we will go to a cinema or something. And here, like all my colleagues, are very nice, nice and very supportive and everything, and so. But I can't call them friends."* (Maria, l. 461-468).

Further, Maria explains that her close friendships with people in Denmark are with other Ukrainians, who she met while participating in the Danish language school, they were members of her group. According to Maria: *"[...]I can call them friends because, we went to Sweden togetgher and support each other and call each other and we meet at our places and have some meals together and it's nice, really nice."*(Maria, l. 479-481).

Based on Jenkins (2014) notions on the process of identification and the distinct orders he defines (individual, interaction and institutional), it can be inferred that in the context of the individual order, Maria perceives the cultural differences between her and her Danish colleagues as an essential element of her difficulty communicating with them. Therefore, she notes that based on Ukrainian culture it is likely for one to become friends with their colleagues if they had a good working relationship, however this is not the case in the current situation Maria is in. Hence, Maria's cultural background and contrasting understanding plays a role in shaping her individual identity and the way she forms relationships with others. On the level of the interaction order, it is highlighted that Maria's interactions with her Danish colleagues differ from her interaction with Ukrainian members of the language school she attends. She emphasises that while her colleagues are friendly and supportive, she cannot consider them as friends, unlike her Ukrainian aquintances she met in Denmark, with whom she has formed a deeper connection through shared experiences. Also, this process of building connections with members of the group Maria identifies along with the sense of familiarity may indicate that Maria asserts her social identity, defining herself in relation to a group she identifies with.

### 4.1.3 Bureaucratic Barriers: Exploring bureaucratic challenges and recognition of rights

As accounted for in the former sections, our participants, in most of the cases have experienced a positive and welcoming reception by the Danish civil society. Many people had a role in shaping their settlement process providing various support in order to help Ukrainian refugees

with dealing with the different circumstances and to navigate their new environment. Moreover, for some of the women, these acquaintances have even shown to be the beginning of long-lasting friendships that helped them establish a sense of belonging towards Denmark. Despite this recognition in the form of social solidarity and the establishment of close friendships, most of our participants explicitly mention and draw attention to their experience and struggles with navigating through the different state institutions they deal with while settling in Denmark. The participants especially find it challenging to manoeuvre the different bureaucratised processes within the system. As it will be unfolded in this section, this level of bureaucratised procedures is not something they are familiar dealing with in Ukraine. Moreover, in this section, we will touch upon how these bureaucratised processes, which in some of the women's cases are slow because of a lack of resources, due to the urgent refugee influx, combined with the differentiating rules regarding integration practices across Denmark originating from the local self-government in the municipalities (Emilsson, 2015, pp. 1-2)[2], can jeopardise their level of legal recognition.

However, as mentioned in the contextual chapter, the European Union and the majority of its member states have been taking extensive actions by implementing the TPD or similar acts based on the TPD, as in the case of Denmark. These measures stand in contrast to the political discourse surrounding the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, where the political focus, as mentioned earlier, was to diminish the number of people fleeing. Therefore, we want to state that both the welcoming attitude Ukrainians are met with, in general, as well as the prompt dissemination of special acts across Europe to protect the large number of people fleeing Ukraine, gives this refugee group an advantage when it comes to the possibility of being protected from persecution, compared with other refugee groups. Moreover, in the Danish context, Ukrainian refugees have also been shown affirmative action in terms of a faster relocation process than normal, as well an immediate access to the labour market, while waiting for their residence permit application to be resolved.

However, in the sections below, we aim to examine (among other aspects related to legal recognition) how this speeded-up process is affecting the women's settlement process in practice.

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[2] It has to be noted that despite that there still exist self-goverment at the local government level, Emilsson stresses that there in recent years have been a tendency of national governments in Denmark to control whether local governments' integration approaches are in line with national integration policies (Emilsson, 2015, p. 2).

*Encounters of slow bureaucratic processes and differentiating rules in the municipalities*

Despite the women's experience of having relatively fast access to getting their residence permits issued according to the Danish Special Act, some still account for that the access to different services lacks behind. Examples of delayed services are education, language courses and welfare payments affected by prolonged bureaucratic processes, due to the excessive load on the local municipalities after the Ukrainian refugee influx in Denmark. Especially one of our participants - Olga, finds it hard to navigate the Danish system when it comes to her daughter with special needs because of her autism diagnosis. She describes the process of finding a school for her daughter slow, also considering the stress her daughter is under, as a consequence of their changed life situation:

> " *(Sighs) Actually it was really, really difficult for me, even if the people are very kind and helpful. Denmark is absolutely different from our mentality and our country, in terms of how to get information. My daughter started to get problems with her behaviour because her life changed and before she got some support and now she did not have it. So she did not want to leave the room for 4 or 5 days. She refused to have online lessons with her Ukrainian school because she did not want to do anything. And I tried to find a school, the "Kommune" (municipality in Danish) looked for a school, but it was so slow. [...] But the host family gave me some information about meetings for the Ukrainians who came, and it was meetings with the Red Cross. [...] They gave me some information about social activities for children and we went there. It was the international school of Hellerup and we came there and they were really really nice! And since my daughter speaks English quite fluently so, she is really involved there, and they invited us to come ASAP, they even every day found some help from volunteers"*
> (Olga, l. 137-155).

Here Olga describes how she is struggling to get the correct information she needs, to be able to help her daughter with speeding up the process of finding a school. First and foremost, she views this as a cultural difference in how information flows circulate in the public service system. In contrast, this flow is more transparent and easier to navigate in Ukraine. While waiting for the municipality to find her daughter Yana a school, Yana stays at home isolating

herself in her room for four to five days because, as Olga describes, she is not used to being without any assistance - something that is crucial now when her life circumstances are turned upside down. However, her social network in the form of their host family helps her to connect with Red Cross, which then directs her to get help from the international school. Reflecting upon their settlement in Denmark, despite the social solidarity they experienced when getting help from her new social network and the civil society to engage her daughter in activities while waiting, Olga is still frustrated about how slow the process was and disappointed that Yana's special needs, were not accommodated at the first stage of their settlement process.

Julilja also ascertains the different manner one needs to navigate in Denmark when it comes to the public service sector, compared to how the system works in Ukraine:

> *"Int: Ah okay and did somebody help you for the documents or with the things or did you.. ?*
> *IP: If you need to do something you need to ask, but in Denmark there is a different system. In my country everything is [happening] quickly. You know you can call, you can do something for more..*
> *Int: Is it more flexible?*
> *IP: Yes or if there is payment you can pay a little more for more quickly.. and in this place I need just to wait and wait and wait (with an inpatient voice)"*
> (Julija, l. 95-102).

Here she describes her frustration over the long waiting time there is in Denmark in comparison with her experience dealing with the Ukrainian public sector. She notices that Ukraine has a different system and that you can often pay more money to be the first in line to get help. In Denmark economic capital cannot be used to speed up the process. Instead, she is faced with coming to terms with the new "immanent rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). This slow process has led to that Julija not attending a language school, despite living in Denmark for approximately six months, due to the load of Ukrainians in her local area who were first in line, before Jullija, to participate in the school. Thus, she only gets access to attend language tests occasionally *(Julija, l. 67-76)*. As a result of this, her right, according to the Special Act, to have access to Danish language courses is not fully fulfilled.

Another participant who has experienced prolonged procedures while settling is Maria. She describes her challenge with opening a bank account, which ends up taking two months. During that period, she cannot get her social benefit disbursed, so after some time, the municipality gives her and her family money once in cash instead *(Maria, l. 14-23)*. In relation to the prolongation of opening a bank account, she describes how this encounter with a heavy bureaucracy came as a negative surprise for them:

> *"IP: Yeah, it is.. actually we thought that there was nothing worse than Ukrainian bureaucracy, but we were wrong. This is not a complaint, it's just something we were not prepared for when we came to this country. When you come to a country like not as a tourist but to live here… yeah… And you need to process some documents and apply for some services and so on.*
>
> *Int: And you live here in the X Kommune?*
>
> *IP: Yeah and they are nice. It's okay. But like I know that in other Kommunes like in other areas, Kommune gives some help like monthly gave some money to buy some basic stuff"*(Maria, l. 25-31).

Despite Maria and her family getting their other documents fast compared with other Ukrainians *(Maria, l. 33-34),* this experience of not having the autonomy to be able to buy essentials needed in their everyday life is something that is negatively engraved in her mind when reflecting back on their reception. Here she also mentions how the rules in relation to the reception of Ukrainian refugees have differed from municipality to municipality – in this way, the access to the different services promised by the Special Act varies, which may result in threatening Ukrainians' reassurance of receiving an equal level of legal recognition in Denmark. Considering, that the level of help differs across municipalities, in accordance to your area of residence in Denmark, this is also a main theme that occurs during the interviews of some of our participants *(Julija, l. 361-377 & Irina, l. 376-386).*

Moreover, as we have discussed in the above examples, these slow processes indicate that the Danish integration apparatus in some locations have not been prepared for the large influx of Ukrainian refugees. Consequently, in some of the participants' cases, this has led to prolonged bureaucratic processes, which have the power of jeopardising their access to the services promised under the Special Act – and hereby compromise what Honneth defines as recognition of legal rights.

***The importance of an individual approach within the public service sector - the risk of
devaluation***

> *IP: […] In the X Kommune for people who are singles, they get 4000 maybe 5000 –
> Denmark helps them or "kommune" helps them, if you have children "kommune"
> helps them a bit more, so it's – maybe it's more money because I talk about if it is
> with taxes – it's before taxes. Yeah so, we have money – and of course thank you so
> much! So, we pay for rent where we live, we pay. We pay for food – we pay, now it is
> not for free. Nothing, yeah. And if we need to get money, we need to go to work
> because we are getting this money and we need to go to work – it is cleaning or
> something like this. So it's not work but we get money and we need to go to work*
> (Julija, l. 271-278).

Julija perceives that Ukrainians, who do not have the means to support themselves financially,
and are still in the process of looking for a job are put in a downgraded position, when receiving
the "Selvfosørgelses- og hjemrejseydelse"[3,] as this amount, as Julija mentions, is insufficient
to cover the basic needs of their families. Moreover, she also explains how she feels that the
rights related to receiving social benefits do not outweigh the obligations in terms of the only
possibility to be offered a work in the cleaning area, while she additionally is expected to take
on an internship in the cleaning industry while looking for a job.  This point can be related to
Honneth's understanding of normative obligations, inspired by Mead, about how individuals
evaluate their rights.  In this case, the Danish living standards could be said to represent the
generalised other. By considering the living expenses, Julija acknowledges that Ukrainians
have a chance to be placed in a downgraded position. Furthermore, this statement can also point
to the fact that she views the low-level income, combined with the obligations they are met
with, to receive the welfare payment, to compromise Ukrainian's legal claims. This message
gets even more visible when she, a bit later in the interview claim: " […] so Denmark helps but
Denmark takes" *(Julija, l. 282).*

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[3] "Selvfosørgelses- og hjemrejseydelse" (in translation from Danish: the self-supporting and repatriation
allowance) Precisely, the scheme for receiving financial allowance in 2022: Adults over 30 living at home receive
6.228 kr. monthly before taxes, while those under 30 living away from home get the same amount. Parents with
a child at home and no right to extra child benefit receive 8.716 kr, while single parents with a child at home and
a right to extra child benefit receive 12.456 kr.

Julija explains later in the interview that she ends up quitting this obligatory relationship with the state, when terminating the agreement with the job centre *(Julija, l. 431-439).* This can be related to what Lipsky (2010), in his theory Street-Level Bureaucracy, views as an interdependent relationship between the social worker and the client. He argues that the interaction between both of these actors serves as an instrumental purpose, meaning that each participant desires something from the other and they will continue to pursue their objectives as long as the value of these objectives exceeds the cost of obtaining them (Lipsky, 2010, p. 56).

Following Lipsky's understanding, Julija does not view the values (in this context, the social benefits) to exceed the cost of attending activation and applying for jobs in the cleaning industry. Considering her termination of this relationship from the perspective of Honneth (1995), this could indicate that she feels her self-respect is being threatened, and by quitting it, she finds a way to resist and hold on to her identity. We will further elaborate on this (in section 4.2.4), regarding the resistance and negotiation of her identity by drawing, among other things, on Nina Gren's notion of "living bureaucratisation". In this section, we examine how she navigates these structural constraints in pursuing her self-realisation through her aspirations of continuing to be an artist.

Hereby, Ukrainians that cannot self-support themselves when arriving in Denmark from the beginning and when looking for a job, are situated in one of the lowest income groups in Denmark. It must be mentioned here that we will not touch upon which economic state they are in, because we find this topic to be a private matter. However, we can note that despite the women being high-skilled, when talking to them off the record, we did encounter that they had differentiating income levels (also considering their refugee background and new reality in Denmark). Thus, according to their previous jobs, it could indicate that some of them might in Ukraine have had a relatively moderate to high level of what Bourdieu defines as economic capital, which has not been convertible for everyone.

According to Hunkler et al. (2022), this can also be a question of to which level their journeys have been fragmented (Ibid., pp. 3 & 9-10). An example of fragmentation could be the urgency to flee and the fleeing itself. Although they do argue that this fragmentation often is less if you have the means to flee fast and to reach the destination you aspire to (Ibid.). However, this project will not investigate the fragmentation of our participant's journeys because it would be

against our ethical conduct to ask questions about their flight to Denmark, as they have just recently fled the ongoing war in Ukraine.

With regards to the economically downgraded position, it becomes crucial that the system meets Ukrainian refugees with an understanding of their individual situations to prevent them from being further marginalised.

Lipsky (2010) in his theory of Street Level Bureaucracy, serves as foundation for understanding the interactions between clients and, what he conceptualize, as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010). This concept is relevant in our research context to understand how the bureaucratic procedures influence Ukrainian women's settlement and integration process and how that can affect their experience of encountering the system. Thus, we can get an insight into how this can impact their level of assessment of services and their subjective evaluation of whether their claims of legal rights are fulfilled or not.

Lipsky argues that street-level bureaucrats often play a central role in political controversies related to public services, as that personnel are responsible for implementing these services and have a significant impact on the lives of citizens (Lipsky, 2010). In his theory, he defines the concept of "the social construction of the client". This refers to the way in which the client as a concept is created, defined, and understood in a particular social context and how a variety of cultural, historical, and societal factors shape this comprehension of the client. Understanding the social construction of a client can provide valuable insights into how services are designed, delivered, and experienced by clients. Lipsky argues that this insight can help to inform the development of more effective service delivery systems (Lipsky 2010, p. 59). This concept becomes relevant in our research context because some of the women articulate how they have come across some constructions that contradict their own self-identification, which has complicated the process of getting the right help within the system.

Maria is one of the women who describe her close encounter with a street-level bureaucrat from the health system, namely her doctor, who did not show understanding for her situation as a forced migrant just fleeing a war when it comes to providing her with a therapist:

> "*Int: Okay. Was it yourself that then, was searching for a psychotherapist or was it the Kommune that suggested it to you?*
>
> *[…]*

> *IP: I have my psychotherapist she is a Ukrainian girl, so we meet on a video chat, but actually we have some kind of medical insurance here and I am allowed to apply through that for a psychotherapist. I don't know the exact procedure, but I should find out actually, because there should be some kind of record from my family doctor in my medical card that I need one. And again, when I came to the doctor and said: "look, I don't sleep. I cry a lot. I don't feel energetic. Please do something." She said: "okay, here are your antidepressants." And I said: "maybe there are some other kinds of pills or some vitamins or something." And she said: "I don't think they will help you. Is it a depression, or it's like a result of the news?" [...] And I said: "I don't know. Of course, it is a result of both." [...] and I was like: "I just can't sleep." And she said: "but I can't stop the war." And I was: "okay? I don't ask you to stop the war" [nervous laugh].*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *Int: Okay. So was actually not that much support from the system, to like..*
>
> *IP: No, there wasn't"* (Maria, l. 780-702).

Here it becomes clear that there is a discrepancy in how Maria understands her own mental well-being compared to how the doctor evaluate the cause of the mental state she is in. The doctor seems to be insensitive about her trauma and current emotional state. Instead of acknowledging her need for professional help to process the trauma she has been going through lately due to the war, she only suggests to to prescribe her antidepressants and disavows helping her any further, by stating that she is not responsible for stopping the war. By only prescribing her the antidepressants, the doctor asserts that this is a natural reaction to the war. As one notices in this quote, she does not listen to Maria's own awareness of her mental state – when claiming that her current emotional unordinary state may have several reasons. Thus, the doctor's social construction of her as a war victim, which psyche can be fixed with some anti-depressives, does not fit the way Maria views her identity and her understanding of a more holistic approach to the treatment of her mental health. Hereby, this lack of recognition results in a lower quality of healthcare offered to her, jeopardises her level of legal recognition, consequently leading to a more downgraded position.

Furthermore, this lack of taking the subject's individual perspective into account is also something Olga faced, when she wanted to change their shared accommodation, to a private

flat – more suitable for her daughter's needs, in terms of the autism diagnosis. In this situation, she encounters a similar problem when she must get documentation that her daughter has a diagnosis. Here the doctor states that she cannot issue a medical certificate because she does not have any proof since her daughter does not take any pills in relation to her autism. However, after a long process, the family department at the municipality ends up acknowledging the doctor's failed judgement and starts helping Olga to find the needed documentation *(Olga, l. 308-327).* Thus, this slow bureaucratic process because of the doctor's misjudged categorisation of her as a client, ends up causing Olga avoidable complications when considering the state the daughter is already in (as described at the beginning of this section).

Moreover, in relation to their experience with the health system, some of the women describe cultural differences in how the medical procedures are done. In contrast, they experience the Ukrainian doctors to be more profound and understanding, which can cause frustrations *(Julija, l. 214-220 & Maria, l. 325-359).*

The bureaucratic system does not only fail to take measures for refugees in a more vulnerable position  or refugees with special needs, but also, as some of our participants claim there is a lack of individual approach when assessing the Ukrainian refugees' cases, in terms of gender-related factors regarding their settlement process. For example, in Irina's case, the government does not consider the fact of her being a single breadwinner mother while her husband needs to stay in Ukraine. Therefore, Irina is dependent on that her mother can live in the same municipality with  her, so that she can also help Irina to take care of her daughter:

> "*IP: […]  now we have some problems with this because she got a visa and the government wrote to us that she must go to the [anonymised] Kommune (another municipality than where Irina is living).  So, this is not okay for us, of course. And we write a letter for the migration office. Maybe they can change their decision. And if they say, 'no' -  but we have waited a long time.  […] I can't understand why. Maybe it's the bureaucratic system, and if my husband came, for example, then they might say, 'Yes, you are family, you can stay together'. But if it's your mother's, they decide it's not your family. I can't understand why. […] because it can be very difficult for me because I usually have a job in the weekend. Now I have a free day, but it's maybe just once a month. And sometimes, I have a job in the evening or very early in the morning, and my mother helps me with my daughter.  And if she goes to another city, I*

*will lose my job, and then it won't be good also for the Kommune because they*
*must pay for me if I don't have a job and that's not okay.*

*Int: No, it's a bit of a limbo situation, yeah."*

*IP: People from the [anonymised] Kommune's office say: 'Oh, we also think*
*this is a mistake because it's not very good for you' and that we can help each*
*other with my mother and …" (Irina, l. 256-274).*

As Erel argues, we as researchers must look out for intersectional factors that can influence the positioning in the receiving society. Hence, it becomes clear that Irina having a low-skilled job in a hotel, where she often works early in the mornings when the kindergarten is closed, combined with her being a single mother, is not something being considered, when the municipality is handling the case of her mother, who has to be allocated to a given municipality. If the migration office does not consider her complaint, she risks losing her job, because if her mother cannot take care of her daughter, Irina needs to be take care of her. She explains that she could not continue working if her mother is prevented from helping her. Especially the support has been useful here at the very beginning, when her daughter had to get used to her new reality in Denmark and a new environment in a kindergarten *(Irina, l. 247-254)*. Moreover, it is important for Irina, to be self-supportive in Denmark as she views this as the fairest for everyone. However, she does emphasise that the municipality claims to have taken into consideration her problem, and that they also agree that her mother should live with Irina and they should support each other.

Maria also shares her frustration by justifying that most of the jobs the women get offered are low-paid jobs, which is a problem for mothers with small children who arrived in Denmark alone. She accounts that the municipality demands from them to either be activated in internships or take on a low-paid job, where the salary often is so low, so the municipality advises them to find a second job (Maria, l. 392-395). By highlighting this obstacle, she engages into the debate about the municipality not applying an individual approach when it comes to the lack of attention to the intersectional factors affecting the type of work opportunities single mothers with small children can accept. The usual focus of the job centers to help in supporting Ukrainian refugees is defined as offering mainly low-skilled jobs that risk the situations of many single mothers, who have arrived in Denmark from Ukraine, putting them into a challenging work-life balance situation. Moreover, this can also lead to that some Ukrainian women with children are not able to work and support their family – a situation Irina

might face if her mother is forced to move to another municipality. Thus, single mothers with small children are perceived to be placed in a disadvantaged position in society, being in one of the lowest income groups, which jeopardises their level of legal recognition.

**4.1.6 Summary of Chapter I**

As demonstrated in the first chapter of the analysis, our findings relate to how our participants' are recognised by the Danish society, who in relation to host families and volunteers and recognition in the shape of caring relationships in the host society can foster a sense of belonging to Denmark. Moreover, for some women, this recognition helps them in their settlement process in terms of strengthening their self-esteem and hereby keeping one's hopes up for one's ambitions. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the importance of building social connections in Denmark to be able to manoeuvre their settlement process, which Eva has realised after getting familiar with her the new surrounding environment.

However, most of the women face several challenges regarding their legal recognition, due to the prolonged bureaucratic processes, because of the large influx of Ukrainian refugees in Denmark. These slow processes have resulted in some of the women not getting their right to social services met in time, according to the legislation of the Danish Special Act. Moreover, the findings demonstrate a lack of individual measures in their meeting with "street-level bureaucrats". As some of the women express, they feel that their individual concerns are not taken into account, which can illustrate how they risk being misconstrued as a specific type of client within the Danish system – which can furthermore lead to compromising their legal rights.

**4.2. Chapter II Navigating the Unknown: Capital, Aspirations and Identity matter**

The second chapter of our analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the various mechanisms Ukrainian female refugees in Denmark employ in order to navigate the conditions in relation to their settlement process. We examine their experience by utilizing notions of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Capitals, Arjun Appadurai's concept of Capacity to Aspire (2003) as well as notions from Richard Jenkins' Social Identity Theory (2014). By drawing upon these theoretical concepts, we investigate how social capital, cultural capital, aspirations and identity

factors help them navigate their new environment as well as how they shape their journeys towards settlement and stability.

### 4.2.1 Social network as a recource

In this section, we will delve into analysing one of the key themes that emerged from our empirical data, which is the importance of social networks in connection to our participants' decisions to flee from Ukraine to Denmark. All of our participants cited the presence of relatives or friends, who are either living in Denmark or have acquaintances in Denmark, as a major factor shaping their decision to migrate. We will examine how our participants' existing social networks and relationships in the host country, may have impacted their experiences during the migration process and how they have affected their settlement in Denmark.

**Irina**

After Irina decided that it is better to flee Ukraine with her daughter in the pursuit of a safer place to stay. Despite being uncertain about the whole process, Irina reached out to an old friend from school, who settled in Denmark many years ago and who might be able to provide her with an insight into a place where Irina and her daughter may stay at. Irina's friend - Alina, played a crucial role in her journey leaving Ukraine, as she immediately offered that both of them can come to stay at her own home in Denmark. Also, Irina emphasises: "*It was only because of my friend. I don't decide like… maybe is a good country or not a very good country, no. […] I was afraid that I am in Europe alone only with my daughter and I wanted to go somewhere where I have friends, someone.*"(Irina, l. 60-64). Hence, the only wish Irina had was to move to a place where she knows somebody and this connection helped her and her daughter to find a safe place to stay. Moreover, having a support network in times of uncertainty and change, moving to an unfamiliar environment in the face of her old friend. Irina and her daughter had to go to Poland for one night, and then on to Denmark with the help of two volunteers who drove them here. They were accommodated in Alina's house for around ten days, yet there were many other people who fled the war and stayed in her friend's house as well. Therefore, as Alina is working in the particular municipality, she helped Irina and her daughter to be hosted by a Danish family - volunteers that cooperate with the municipality.

Irina emphasises the crucial help she received from her friend and the Danish family, which stands in contrast to the situations of other Ukrainian families she knows:

> *"Yeah, we lived with the Danish family and they give us everything because I didn't have a job. They were thinking about everything for us. I know that Kommune pay something to them, but I think they lost more money than they received. But I know some families who live alone, and it was very difficult because they must pay for everything themselves and of course, it's very expensive if you have money only from Ukraine and a more expensive life in Denmark.[...] "* (Irina, l. 120-124)

Irina emphasizes the vital support of the host family and gives a comparison with other families, she knows, who did not have the same opportunities and had a difficult time as they had to pay for everything themselves, without any financial support in the beginning, which can be very hard, considering the difference of standard of living between Denmark and Ukraine. Accordingly, Bourdieu's concept of the forms of capital defines social capital as the value of an individual's networks and relationships, which can be maintained through material and/or symbolic exchanges. They can also be socially guaranteed through institutionalised relationships, formal relationships or informal relationships. Hence, Irina's social capital and connection to her friend in Denmark, who also provided her with a network of connections and resources to help her to navigate the settlement process in Denmark. It is assumed that this is an example of material and symbolic exchanges based on their social relationship. Additionally, her friend's offer of housing and support is an example of how social capital can be mobilised to provide practical support. Bourdieu notes that the profits deriving from being a member of a group form the basis of solidarity can be both material, such as services provided by the group, and symbolic, such as prestige associated with the group and they are not necessarily "consciously pursued as such" (....). Irina's friend help her with finding a Danish family who also provided her with help with financial resources that might not have been available to her if she were living alone in Denmark.

Also, Irina stresses:

> *"I have some friends, it was very good that we lived with a Danish family because people I know, girls who live in a special house only with Ukrainians, they haven't spoken to and haven't spent a long time with Danes. But we have some parties with Danish people, and we go swimming in the sea together, and usually, they are very friendly. [...]"* (Irina, l.184-187).

This said, in terms of symbolic resources, living with the Danish family helped Irina to develop a sense of belonging as well as to gain access to the establishment of close connections to Danish society.

**Eva**

Eva's experience has been similar. Before the war, she did not know much about Denmark, and their decision to go to this country was mainly influenced by the director of her children's school who knew Eva and her family well. The director had a friend, who was a volunteer in Denmark and helped Eva to connect with them. Thus, through the friend of their friend, they find a family of farmers who is willing to host their family.                                      She                                      notes:

*"For the first months, we lived in the house close to them, because it was like a private hotel, something like that, they gave us three small rooms. After that, the season for their clients started and they asked us to move to another house of theirs, an old house not far from that place. We moved there."* (Eva, l. 100-103).

This illustrates how social capital played a facilitative role in providing Eva and her large family with the resources they needed to navigate their settlement in Denmark upon their arrival.

**Julija**

Julija, who first fled her hometown and moved to another Ukrainian city - Lviv, which a bit later also falls within the range of the Russian bombs, decided to come to Denmark with her son, after she communicates with a friend on Facebook who connects her with people they know from Denmark. At that time, Julija is very concerned as she did not imagine how she will be able to flee Ukraine altogether with her family and her four dogs, due to the limited transport opportunities that would allow that. According to her:

*[...] it was just a friend on Facebook that told me: " I have a friend in Denmark". I have never been to this wonderful place so I just clicked on Facebook and they said: "Hey, hello – how can I help you?". I said: "It's not possible because I have four dogs,*

*so, yeah but 2 days after a car came near my house and they said: "We are here come on!".* (Julija, l. 14-18).

Thus, the volunteer not only helps Julija and her family and pets to flee Ukraine but also arranges their settlement in Denmark in a shared facility with other Ukrainians. Julija's experience highlights the role of social connections in facilitating access to resources and opportunities. She was able to rely on the help and support of a friend, who in turn connected them to other people willing to help. This supports the idea of social capital having a multiplier effect, as the individual's connections provided them with practical assistance, such as a car to transport them and their dogs to Denmark and a place to be accommodated.

**Olga**

Olga came in Denmark together wtih her daughter,  with the help of a friend, who she knows through her network,  related to parents with children with autism. She explains:

> *"And I sent her an email [to the contact in Denmark] and asked about how I can come and she found me a host family through Aid Ukraine – this is an organisation in Denmark who help with accommodation. [...] and we came here to Hellerup and stayed with a host family, they are really nice."* (Olga, l. 125-129).

Therefore, she is redirected to a volunteer working in the help organization: "Aid Ukraine",  an acquaintance of her friend. The volunteer takes up their case and finds a family to host Olga and her daughter. From this moment on, the family takes care of Olga and her daughter until they find a private accommodation and also help Olga to navigate the practicalities around the process of settlement, she emphasises:

> *"And we keep in touch with them – Karen is very nice and we meet in a café for Yana's birthday and when I have my birthday [...] They helped me to fill in the application and Karen's husband took us to the immigration center and helped us to apply and he gave his e-boks mail to get an answer as soon as possible and um ..."* (Olga, l. 267-273).

Not only the Danish family helped her with the challenges that the bureaucratic processes presented, but also they became friends with Olga and her daughter who they meet until this day.

**Maria**

Maria, altogether with her mother, sister and nephew have been invited to come to find refuge in Denmark by a distant relative who has been living in Denmark for 40 years now. Accordingly, a Russian cousin of theirs, who is married to a Dane, accommodates her and her relatives in their home. Subsequently, they also help them to deal with the settlement procedures related to registering and documentation, thus they got their documents very swiftly. Maria explains:

> *"Maybe because we were with the Danish family, so they supported us in this process. So we got our MitID and NemID like everything very quickly. As I said, people really struggle in these processes because they don't know how to do it, how to register with this tax service." (*Maria, l. 299-302).

Maria emphasises that having her relatives here, who are able to guide them through the different procedures in relation to settlement has been of crucial importance to their experience with registering in Denmark. Moreover, she notes that she has a basis of comparison to other Ukrainians who have had a hard time going through these processes alone, without support.

### 4.2.2. Language as a facilitator of integration

Drawing upon Bourdieu's notions on linguistic capital, this section explores the value of an individual's language skills, as a form of embodied cultural capital that determines the individual's position in the social space. Thus, a value of a particular language may refer to the advantages it brings to the speaker in relation to improved access to financial and social benefits within a given linguistic market. (Zschomler, 2019; Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu, 1977)

In that sense, we aim to understand the significant role of English language proficiency and its crucial impact in the context of settlement in Denmark. It is crucial to note that Danish is the only official language in Denmark, however, we analyse the meaning of English language skills in relation to its widespread usage in the country. According to Lønsmann and Thøgersen (2022), in recent decades English usage has undergone a process of normalisation in Denmark,

thus becoming an integral part of the linguistic landscape. Despite the fact, that in official legislation and language policies, English is not much designated with a special status compared to other foreign languages, in ideological sense, it is argued that this process of normalisation of its usage has led to Denmark transitioning from its monolingual identity to a multilingual identity with English (as an unofficial) second language. Hence, we in this section we aim to understand how the embodied linguistic capital in terms of proficiency in English, has influenced our refugees' experience in Denmark (Lønsmann & Thøgersen, 2022, p. 167).

Prior to her journey, our interviewee Eva receives a piece of advice from her friend who assisted her and her family to flee Ukraine and go to Denmark: "*she advised us to go to Denmark, because I speak English and almost everybody in Denmark speak English*" (Eva, l. 68-70). As English is widely spoken in Denmark, her friend presupposes that going to Denmark would be a suitable country for Eva and her family to stay, because of Eva's English language skills. During her interview, Eva added:

"*And my job for me for sure is not a problem, because my first job - I started to look in Facebook and found it the next day and for sure it's not a problem if you know English and you are willing to work.*" (Eva, l. 233-235)

Through the process of looking for a job, Eva realized that her proficiency in English is an essential instrument for finding one. Also, Eva holds a diploma for higher education in English from the best Ukrainian university, as she explains and she would like to validate this diploma and look for a job in the IT field, using English as the main working language. Pierre Bourdieu notes that the value and usefulness of different types of capital can vary based on the context and can vary depending on the specific situation and that the social positioning of an individual is determined by the types and amount of capital they possess. In the case of Eva, English language skills, which may be defined as her linguistic capital is an essential element to navigate her integration process in Denmark.

Eva states that, as her husband is not fluent in English, he has issues finding a job himself. However, as he possesses a high level of expertise and skills in repairing, painting and sewing pieces of furniture which was also his main occupation in Ukraine, both of them decided to open a business together. Due to his lack of proficiency in Danish or English, Eva becomes the main communicator mediating between her husband and Danish society. She notes:

*"So maybe, yes, I have a possibility to go somewhere and start to work but he needs me near him to speak English. Without me it's a great problem, he doesn't understand anything or anyone around him so"* (Eva, l. 128-130).

Here, Eva notes that her husband relies on her to communicate in English with people as he has a hard time navigating his new surroundings. Hence, the lack of linguistic capital appears as a main barrier for Eva's husband to facilitate his knowledge and skills in the specific area in order to integrate successfully in Denmark.

In addition, based on Irina's experience English skills are important for her to build close connections within the Danish society. When asked about how she feels about the host society, she notes: *"Everybody was very friendly to us, and I think that it's very good that I can speak English. Not very well, but we can speak with each other. Yeah. And if you can speak…"* (Irina, l. 188-189) Despite the lower level of her English fluency, she assumes that English has been an important factor when it comes to communicating with the Danish society and building relationships. She adds:

*"It's not very difficult and it's good because I know many Ukrainians that cannot find a job because some of them don't know any language. Everything is very difficult, so it's really good that I have a job"* (Irina, l. 84-86).

Thus, Irina's ability to speak English has allowed her to engage in beneficial social interactions and to access working opportunities in comparison with other Ukrainian refugees who struggle to find work, because of their lack of language skills.

Similar experience, shares Maria, who a few months after her arrival received a good job opportunity matching her skills, she notes: *"Yes, they also use English language as their basic language which of course make things easier I would say [...]"* (Maria, l. 213-214). In addition, she also exemplifies how other Ukrainian she know have difficulties settling if they do not speak English:

> *"It is easier if you speak English. [...] But I have a.. I know people who were economists, accountants, lawyer, but they worked only in Ukraine and they didn't need English for their works. So, they never studied it"* (Maria, l. 319-324).

As our previously mentioned participants, Maria's perception also emphasises the significance of linguistic capital and the challenges that may occur because of its lack and how these are interconnected to the idea of gaining access to economic opportunities. She further defines her English fluency as a main advantage while settling in Denmark and navigating difficulties in this process: *"And again like I'm in a much better situation because I speak English. Perhaps it's not perfect, but it's good enough to communicate, to work, to… to settle all the problems"* (Maria, l. 676-679).

For Olga, English also occurs as an asset for integration, and it's been crucial for her daughter with autism to get easily involved with the many activities in her new school, despite all the bureaucratic difficulties they have experienced regarding their settlement. Furthermore, she defines her English fluency as a valuable instrument for her self-realization and integration in Denmark.

### 4.2.3 Self-Realisation and aspirations - The attempt to pursue aspirations to reach self-realisation in Denmark

In this section, we will examine how our participants, through their aspirations, manage to navigate their integration processes. Especially, we are interested in the ways our participants seek to obtain the possibility to self-realise themselves (following Honneth's understanding of self-esteem) when establishing themselves in the Danish job market. As this section will demonstrate, the attempt of the participants to pursue their aspirations, in their new social reality in Denmark, is built on their hopes of attaining self-realisation (except for one participant). In this regard, it becomes interesting how the agency unfolds in the way they manage to manoeuvre to hold on to their aspirations. Furthermore, we aim to scrutinise how these aspirations reflect the subjective realm of their forms of primarily cultural and symbolic capital, approaching it from a convertible perspective inspired by Umut Erel (2010).

Additionally, we want to study their identifications, following Jenkin's Social identity theory (2014). Moreover, we want to explore the interplay between their agency, which discloses in this navigational process, and how structural constraints in the form of bureaucratised integration practices affect this process. Furthermore, we will also highlight how, for some of our participants, it is not only a question of aspirations related to career plans, but also of other

aspirations that relate to life preferences and how these can play a role in their settlement and integration process.

**Julija**

As already mentioned in Chapter I, Julija decides to terminate the obligatory relationship with the state, in the form of the job centre, because she views the obligations to exceed the actual valuable outcome of being a part of this contract. In this sense, she cannot come to terms with the fact that; the only possibility of being a part of this reciprocal relationship is to compromise her self-realisation, taking on a cleaning job, which she does not view to be a proper job (Julija, l. 271-278). In the following quote, she criticises the job centre, for not taking Ukrainian refugee's individual resources obtained from their former job experience into account, when helping them in their job-seeking processes:

> *"Int: And then can you tell us more about your job-seeking experience when you are looking for a job?*
> *IP: Yes it's, um. Because of course, many many people have different work experience. But in the job centre they have cleaning, cleaning, or cleaning, you know? You can just do this, this, or this. And no matter if you know English, no matter if you can do something different. So yeah, they have just this proposition and if you want something different, you have to find work by yourself, so."*
> *Int: Without help?*
> *IP: Yes, because if I want something more comfortable for me, I have to do something [else]*
> *because the job centre has different propositions. Maybe just in cleaning or something yeah"* (Julija, l. 226-236).

This statement can be related to Nina Gren's notion of "living bureaucracy" (Gren, 2020). According to Gren's empirical findings, she finds a lack of possibility to pursue individualised aspirations within the Swedish integration practices. Julija perceives the Danish integration practices that infiltrate the job centre as limiting to a great extent because of a lack of a more individual approach when supporting refugees in their job-seeking process. This could indicate that she views these practices as a space lacking to offer opportunity for individuals to have independent opinions and a chance to co-determine their future careers in Denmark. Julija stresses that no matter which kind of resources or skills you bring, Ukrainians at the job centre

do not get recognised for what Honneth views to be the valuation of what an individual can contribute with in society. Thus, Julija's space for self-realisation and getting her need for self-esteem covered by doing so becomes challenging. Moreover, Julija's feeling of lacking autonomy gets even more exposed when she accounts for the job centre's and the language school's sanction-system that to her appears inflexible:

*"Yeah you don't have.. if you don't go to your language school it's a "straf" (punishment in Danish), if you don't go to the job centre it's a straf, it's a big big matter. So, if you write [that you can't come] or leave you get straf, straf, straf"* (Julija, l. 280-282).

Hereby she does not view the system to be understanding towards if people have some personal reasons not to attend some of the scheduled activities. This frustration may also reflect her own situation dealing with war-related trauma (Julija, l. 413-420).

Returning to the first quote, Julija argues that she wants to do something more comfortable for her – meaning pursuing her aspiration about maintaining her identity as an artist and establishing a fundament for her art career here in Denmark. Based on Gren's argument that aspirations can have a hard time to co-exist within the integration system, this can be related to Julija's perception of her missing capability to pursue her aspirations within this system, characterised by missing prospects for obtaining self-realisation.

Therefore, after realizing that her identification at the job centre is not recognised, after being a part of this integration practice for some time, she resists by terminating this contract. Thus, what Bourdieu defines as an individual's economic capital, has in Julija's case been convertible in the sense that she is able to self-support herself and is not dependent on getting this welfare payment that this reciprocal relationship offers. Another proof that her economic capital has been convertible is that she has the means to let her son attend a private school in Jutland where he lives.

This resistant behaviour towards the expected norms of the job centre opens up a room for negotiating her identity and a possibility to maintain autonomy and strategise how to convert her institutionalised cultural and symbolic capital, in order to succeed with her aspirations. Julija shows that she is still able to hold on to her self-esteem and is in the process of figuring out how to covert her institutionalised cultural capital in the form of her artistic skills into something that is found valuable at the Danish job market:

*"I can do many many things, so I worked with cinema, and I worked with a design practice, so I can paint anything, so I can make something old into something new or just paint – so I can do many many things. I started studying language "dansk" (Danish), but I can't do anything different with the Danish language, so I think.. something creative, or I had a garden and I love flowers, and I can do composition - many many things, so I try to find a work that is more creative. But of course, it's just trying to find it – it has not happened yet, now (laughing)"* (Julija, l. 239-244).

Here, Julija account for the cultural resources she is bringing that she could potentially convert and use in her new social setting in Denmark. She aspires to work with something more creative, however she acknowledges that she has still not resolved, how to transform these skills. Nonetheless, she is in the process of validating these following Erel's understanding, deploying notions by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2007), of how migrants strategise to validate their capitals. Julija does this by negotiating her identity as an artist in a social context, only engaging with people, if there exists a more equal understanding of what one should expect from the other:

*Int: And then have you experienced prejudice, the thing again about feelings towards you while looking for a job? Have you experienced that because of your nationality, or gender or..?*

*IP: Um fortunately no I don't have this experience because I try to find people who know me or we speak about.. they understand what they should expect and we connect and fortunately no"* (Julija, l. 299-304).

Hereby her agency gets visible in the way she takes control over her job-seeking process. These acquaintances could indicate that she is able to convert her social capital and her symbolic capital of having the status of being an artist, to an extent where she connects with people who perceive her for "who she really is" - her self-identification as an artist, trying to resist as well as preserve her identity. Thus, in the social context she engages in, according to her perception, there is an actual possibility to pursue her aspiration and hereby self-realise herself. In this way, she withdraws from the bureaucratised job centre that does not recognize her in the way she perceives her real identity, and escapes from, in her view, a demand of unrealistic obligations.

In relation to her navigational process, Julija emphasizes that she has an advantage in terms of feeling more comfortable in Denmark, because she is used to traveling and therefore, she is familiar with different cultures' norms:

> *"I feel really comfortable, I feel really comfortable, because before I travelled and saw different cities and different countries, so it's my first time in Denmark and therefore I feel more comfortable. But we have a different system and when you travel it is one, if you live here it's a different system"* (Julija, l 148-151).

Hereby, this could indicate that she perceives that the embodied cultural resources she has gathered from travelling can help her to navigate the different culture in Denmark - because she is used to move in different cultures and within different norms, thus she has been cultivated in a cosmopolitan sense (Bourdieu, 1986). However, she acknowledges that these cultural resources are not directly convertible, as she is not a tourist anymore. Therefore, her new situation as a refugee demands new strategies to deal with the bureaucracy she comes across in the process of settlement. Quitting the job centre is a step for her to open up for her capability to aspire. However, she is still working on her navigational capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), as she tries to validate her cultural resources in the form of her artistic background.

An aspiration that might also affect this navigational process is her desire to return to Ukraine when it is possible. Nonetheless, she still describes herself as being in a mental state, where she is not able to imagine when to return, considering the traumas she recently has gone through *(Julija, l.126-136 & 245-256)*. In the following quote, she describes her longing after Ukraine when talking about her expectations of her life after arriving in Denmark: *"It's such a nice country, it's a wonderful country, I love it and feels so comfortable, but my heart and my.. all the time every.. I don't know every 10 min I remember my place, every time! So, all he time, in my feelings I return to my place, […]"* (Julija, l. 124-126). Her sense of belonging to Ukraine is not something she deliberately expresses to affect her obtainment of self-realisation in Denmark. However, her narrative is influenced by her overall aspiration to return to her life and her husband in Ukraine.

**Eva**

> *"You know, we will not return this year or next year to Ukraine for sure. Even if the war stops tomorrow, our country now is very dangerous for children. There are weapons in our country and there are problems with food and electricity and heating, and we are now building everything and thinking to stay here. We will see how it is, but this helps us to stand and build everything on a very stable basis of our hopes and wishes. We are not dreaming to go to Ukraine as soon as possible. We think we will stay here for long time.."* (Eva, l. 251-256).

Eva's aspiration is to build a foundation for her family in Denmark, to live in a safe environment where they do not fear losing their lives. Moreover, she wants to stay in a place where it is guaranteed that they have the basic amenities they need, to be able to give their children the best basis for their upbringings.

She stresses that this hope to provide her children with a better future than they could have in Ukraine, works as a motivational force for her and her husband to be able to build a business from scratch, which helps them to navigate this prospect. As this section will demonstrate, it is a challenging process, but something that they aspire to do, despite acknowledging that this ambition could be hard to achieve when arriving here as refugees, because there is no framework in the integration system to help refugees with building start-ups.

At the beginning of Eva's stay, she started to work in the cleaning area, an experience she did not mind: *"I had no bad feelings about that"* (Eva, l. 79-80). Since she was psychically incapable of continuing with this job, Eva and her husband made another strategy together on how to manage to make a living in Denmark in order to provide for their large family:

> *"Since we arrived, I started to look for a job as soon as possible, and I started to work as a cleaner and did it for 2 and a half months, but suddenly I started to have problems with my hands. It's called 'tennis elbow'. So, I get a strong pain in my hands after 11 hours of cleaning in one day. Because the company liked my work so much, they gave me so much work and that was a problem. After that, with my husband, we decided that.. he doesn't know Danish or English, but he is very experienced in repairing furniture – painting, sewing and all of this. He has such a great experience with this, he did something even for our President Zelenskiy, he was his client. So, we decided to try to open a business because he is such a high-level*

*specialist. We began, a month ago we received a CVR number and now we are*
*renting a space in the city and just preparing everything for the clients to come"* (Eva,
l. 28-37).

Eva quits her job and puts her personal working life on pause. Thus, she compromises her own self-realisation, at least for a period, to help her husband build up a business, so he can use his skills for upholstery and repairing furniture. Here, we see an example of how they strategise to convert  Eva's husband's cultural capital - his experience with repairing furniture. Moreover, she also accounts for his prestigious accomplishment in Ukraine, as he has worked by the appointment of  President Volodymyr Zelenskyj - hereby validating his skills utilising the symbolic capital this achievement exemplifies.

For now, Eva's ambition is to work full-time and use her embodied cultural resources in the form of her high-level English skills to connect with people and recruit clients for their family business (Eva, l. 115-120). However, her long-term aspiration is to work as an IT developer, as she recently acquired her bachelor's degree in programming and engineering from a prestigious university. Besides this, she also claims to be highly-skilled, having a master's degree in banking with 10 years of experience in a high working position within the field (Eva, l. 8-12). She further elaborates on her long-term plan and her aspiration to work in the IT sphere and how she wants to achieve that:

> *"Int: You said a little bit about that you wanted to work in IT in the future. So, do you*
> *want to use your education, or are you studying right now?*
>
> *IP: I want to use my education because my diploma is in English and it's from the*
> *best university in Ukraine. I want to apply for, I don't remember the name of*
> *the institution, but just to approve my education in order to search for work,*
> *I want to work as an IT developer. But in the IT sphere, it's not like you have*
> *an education and then you start to work whenever you want to.  You have to*
> *keep your knowledge fresh, and you have to work on it because you can forget it"* (Eva,
> l. 217-222).

She deliberately uses her modest spare time to study and practice in relation to her degree in programming and engineering (Eva, l. 46-50), as she is aware that if she must be able to convert this institutionalised cultural capital in the future, she has to continue to upgrade this cultural

resource, not to waste her skills. Moreover, she accounts for herself as a: *"very active and creative person"* (Eva, l. 233-236) who will not have a problem succeeding with her aspiration *(Ibid.)*. This could indicate that her individual order of identity, following Jenkins' understanding (Jenkins, 2014), is characterised by a self-confidence, which helps her navigational capability regarding her capacity to aspire.

Returning to the challenges of starting their own business, Eva and her husband view Denmark in general, as the perfect place to create a start-up. However, despite these good and transparent circumstances for building a business, Eva expresses her frustration over the lack of a legal framework for helping people with refugee status to have an opportunity to start up their own companies:

> **"** *[…] About business and so on, I like how the system is built for those who want to start a business here in Denmark because you have a good system for business-making. It's clever and it helps people to start and to work because in Ukraine our business system is quite more complicated and less friendly than yours. Also, I don't like the way how we are now without any help from the government, because now we needed it so strongly and the Danish system is full of rules, strict rules and there are no rules for those who want to start a business, like refugees and so on. We don't have any help now and it's not good, we don't want to ask our friends because now we have a lot of Danish friends and they always say: 'just ask and we'll give you everything you need because you are so good people', and we don't want to ask because it's not in a Ukrainian nature to go and to ask: "can you please help us" [ironically]"* (Eva, l. 137-147).

This frustration also reflects her deep concern about not having enough money to feed their children because they no longer have any welfare payments, after pursuing the goal of opening the furniture *repairing* company (Eva, l. 109-114). This frustration can be related to Gren's point about standardised bureaucracies within integration practices, which lack the opportunities for refugees to aspire in more individualised ways. Here, Eva is indirectly referring to the strict rules that do not take her family's complex situation into account, related to her physical incapability to take on a cleaning job due to her health problems, as well as her husband not having language skills to help him navigate his settlement in Denmark and to get

a job himself. Eva acknowledges that the integration practices do not provide a legal framework for refugees to start their own companies. However, she does not comprehend how they can let a family of seven people to be left without any financial state support, while starting up their own business, which cannot grant them income from the very beginning. As a result, they find themselves in a difficult financial state at the moment, where they potentially, for a period, can risk being marginalised.

**Irina**

> *"Int: [...] how do you feel about your work in Denmark and in relation to what you worked with in Ukraine?*
> *IP: Of course, sometimes I think, how I studied at university, and I have, I will have something different than that [articulates with hands something similar to a lower-level job] ... But I think it's very good that I have some job at least and I feel good with my colleagues, and it's very important, they are very friendly, and it's very.. I have a very good boss, and they are very friendly. I understand that if I want to have something better than cleaning, I must study the language. I started to study, but I hope that in spring, in summer, we can come back home. That's it.*
> *Int: Of course, I also wish you that; I wish you that!*
>
> *IP: I don't have a long-term plan for Denmark, and I have a home"* (Irina, l. 276-285).

Irina aspires to return home to Ukraine, as soon as possible when the war comes to an end. However, she finds herself in a state of temporariness, hoping that her return is reachable in the foreseeable future. At this moment, she wants to stay in Denmark because she no longer has the income from her and her husband's hospitality business and therefore has no means of living left in Ukraine (Irina, l. 165-173). This state of temporariness affects her integration process. As we see in this quote, she does not have a long-term prospect of staying in Denmark because, as she describes it, she already has a home in Ukraine, and therefore, she has only settled temporarily. Thus, she has accepted to work in a low-skilled job, preparing breakfast and cleaning at a hotel (Irina, l. 80-83). In this way, she compromises her self-realisation at the moment, compared with her working life in Ukraine, where she usually owns a small hotel and a restaurant with her husband (Irina, l. 77-79). Although for Irina, her life right now is not about

self-realisation. She stresses that for her, the most crucial factor is that she can be self-supportive and have as a normal everyday life in Denmark as possible:

> *"IP: Yeah, but if you study in the university and then have a good job in Ukraine, now you have something not very good in Europe, but also nobody wants to stay at home and only get money from the government, of course. Not all, but many Ukrainians just want to have a job. And when you have a job, you study the language more quickly. And you speak with different people, and you feel yourself better because you're not feeling like an invalid or something.*
>
> *Int: You feel like, yeah, fulfilled because you do something, you contribute?*
>
> *IP:  When I was staying at home, I only read the news all the time and was thinking: 'oh no, my life, oh - fighting Russians, oh what do we do now' … all of it. It was very difficult. But now when I have a job and do some sport and I'm with my daughter and my mother […]"* (Irina, l. 341-343).

Here, we grasp how Irina is coping with her emotions from the distress the war has caused, by having an active life, having a job, surrounded by her colleagues that take her mind off the traumas she has been facing and is still is facing, while watching the news for instance, which has resulted in that she now feels more at ease. This social interaction with her colleagues and the way it helps her to cope, can be related to Jenkins' understanding of how the interaction order can shape an individual's identification process. Hereby, her individual order of emotions caused by the ongoing war in Ukraine, is then through the interaction order, in the form of her relationship with her colleagues, processed in a way, that she now identifies herself as an active and engaging person rather than an *"invalid"* – referring to the state of being helpless because of the war. In this way, she is negotiating her identity as a refugee by wanting to be an active member, contributing to society.

Instead of being *"invalid",* she values being self-supportive. She accounts for this choice of being active on the job market in a low-skilled job, rather than pursuing her potential as a business owner in the field of hospitality, by referring to other Ukrainians who also aim to be self-supportive. In this way, she explains her choice of placing self-realisation as a low priority, by not aspiring for a more highly-skilled job. Following the understanding of symbolic interactionism, which IPA also draws on, she, in this context, by referring to Ukrainians,

compares her choice with the "generalised other" (other Ukrainians), to account for her positioning in society to us as researchers.

**Olga**

As we have previously note, while discussing the legal recognition of our participant's, Olga's overall aspiration infiltrating all her life preferences, is to create a safe space and to ensure a good environment where her daughter has the possibility to develop and prosper, despite her autism diagnosis. Therefore, as she explains, if she manages to settle herself successfully in Denmark she would like to stay, primarily because of her perception of Denmark as a country offering the suitable setting for that:

> *"[...] and here - it is a good environment for her because it is safe everywhere and she feels relaxed [...] And she got new skills here. In our home city in Ukraine, I could not let her go by herself and here I started to let her go to school by herself by bike, and she went to school by bike and she likes it - to be independent. [...] But this is the main goal for autistic people to be independent - to have an independent life. So, I have seen that in Denmark there is an environment to develop independence"* (Olga, l. 594-603).

First and foremost, she wants to secure Yana's future - her daughter, as well as to ensure she feels protected. Olga views Denmark, as offering a suitable environment for this, and furthermore, she stresses that she believes Yana has a better chance to develop her skills here in Denmark, than she had in Ukraine. She perceives these better chances to be a question of Denmark's different approach towards individuals with disabilities, in her daughter's case - an autism diagnosis, where the focus, to a higher extent, is on unfolding people's potential for independence. Moreover, this life preference reflects the last six years of Olga's life, after she left the bank, and has devoted her time advocating for children's rights with special needs and has achieved results by improving children's access to assistive devices (Olga, l. 35-69).

Considering her more individualised aspiration, her ambition is to be able to work within her field as an economist. In order to achieve that, she plans on both getting her Ukrainian diploma

for high education approved and by developing her skills, so she can be in a more favourable position, while seeking a job:

> *"Int: Have you thought about any area you would like to study in - have you thought about any studies or programmes you would like to participate in?*
> *IP: First, I think that I'm an economist. I would like to keep on studying in this field because I have the competencies. Maybe ... for me, it is difficult to be flexible and find another way of studying. It is easier for me to learn something I have learned before.*
> *Int: Yes, and then build on that?*
> *IP: Yes, to improve and to be able to work in the new system."* (Olga, l. 403-409).

Thus, she strategises to convert her institutionalised cultural capital in the form of her university degree in economics, to improve her skills within the Danish education system, so these become more suitable for the Danish job market – and in this way, with time, she can obtain a higher level of self-realisation. However, this process of getting her diploma validated, so her skills can be viewed as valuable by the Danish employees, is an obstacle she, to a high degree, finds difficult to navigate. Olga describes that she, in general in Denmark, finds herself in an information vacuum, which challenges her settlement process:

> *"Int: […] and can you describe how your settlement process has been like after you arrived in Denmark. You also already described it a bit, but can you say some more about it?*
> *IP: The big problem for me.. there is an information vacuum; I don't understand where to get information. It's really difficult […] "* (Olga, l. 228-232).

This general apprehension of being in an information vacuum also affects Olga's ability to manoeuvre the process of getting her diploma approved. She stresses that this challenging situation is also caused by the slow bureaucratic process she is facing at the job centre; she inquired her job consultant two months ago to get some information about the procedure of getting her diploma validated, but after getting a link sent, which she did not manage to use, Olga is still waiting for further assistance from her job consultant (Olga l. 196-208). This experience illustrates that the structural constraint in the shape of the slow bureaucratic system she is facing, prolongs the practicalities around the approval of her education and subsequently,

decreases her capacity to aspire, following Appadurai's understanding. Despite facing this constraint, Olga still seems hopeful that she will succeed in finding a way to self-realise herself. At the end of the interview, she is referring that: *"Denmark is a country of possibilities"* (Olga, l. 682-683). She accounts for that a way for her to navigate her new environment in Denmark, is to learn from Danish people how to administrate their working life:

> *"Int: [...]. Is there something that has helped you to get used to your new life in Denmark?*
>
> *IP: ... First, I try to accept the Danish style of living because they wake up early, they go to bed early; it is very different from Ukraine. And then I noticed that Danish people are busy all the time. And um, maybe Ukrainians are a little bit slow, but we need to learn from Danish people*
>
> *to be effective - to be time effective"* (Olga, l. 629-634).

With this statement, Olga acknowledges that there exists a cultural difference between Ukraine and Denmark, in terms of how people administer their work/life balance. Here, she describes how important it is for her to learn from Danish people to be time effective, so she can have a better basis for joining the Danish labour market, adhering to the Danish culture. This relates to Bourdieu's understanding of embodied state of cultural capital. Olga finds herself in a new social space, where she must get familiar with the new cultural embodiment. Her assimilation approach to integration (in this example), demands personal investment to learn the new "immanent rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). This strategy of not converting but actually producing a new form of embodied cultural capital can also be related to what Appadurai defines as an individual's navigational capacity. Returning to Appadurai's theory, he argues that the most powerful in a society have the knowledge of how to aspire and can work out, which means lead to their desired ends. Hence, Olga's strategy of learning how to be more time effective from the more powerful part of society (in this context, the Danish majority), is a way for her to develop her navigational capacity – by getting aware of what it takes to become a vital part of the Danish labour force and the potential demands she might face at a prospective working place.

This cultural learning process also becomes essential for her navigational capability, because she finds herself placed in a more privileged position, within the social space of Ukrainian refugees in Denmark, due to her embodied cultural resource of speaking English (Olga, l. 438-452). Thus, she mentions that many Ukrainians have difficulty relating to her challenges, as they often do not speak English. Hence, they face differentiated obstacles compared to Olga,

and therefore it is hard for her to recieve help from them, regarding ways to navigate her new social reality in Denmark.

Despite facing these challenges in succeeding with her aspiration regarding her career plans, it must be noted that at the time we conducted the interview with Olga, she had already got an internship at the International School of Hellerup, with the help of her social network. There, she primarily works on administrative tasks (Olga, l. 171-179). Moreover, she had the possibility to boost her social esteem when they encouraged her to make a talk for the children, about her advocacy work for children with disabilities in Ukraine. Thus, the International School have made space for her self-realisation to some extent (Olga, l. 358-368). In this way, she is able to convert the cultural resources from her advocacy work in Ukraine and get them validated because the International School recognises the value of her experience as a unique quality to which she can contribute.

**Maria**

Maria has quite an extraordinary story regarding her job situation in Denmark. As already mentioned, she got a job offer from a big international Danish company, where she is working in a position on the same level as in Ukraine, hence she is able to use all her former experience. Maria was considering going back to Ukraine when her family, whom she came with, started to talk about returning to Ukraine, after facing challenges with settling in Denmark. However, in that period, after having struggled with her job search for some time, she got a job offer from the company, who had received her CV from the municipality (Maria, l. 186-192). Thus, she has not been limited by a standardised bureaucratisation from the municipality's site, in terms of pursuing her individualised aspiration, following Gren's understanding of "living bureaucratisation". In the following quote, she describes her reaction to getting this job offered:

> *"[…]. So, when they contacted me, and they said that they are ready to give an offer and I was said: 'Really?' [LAUGHS]. But it was a hard decision, because when my husband was like: 'when will you come back, it's quite quiet here' …There was a period when it was really quiet. Everyone was like, not sure how long that will last but.. When I got my job he was like: 'oh, so you're staying?' And I said: 'I want to give it a try, so. But I will try to come home'"* (Maria, l. 225-230).

Maria aspires to go home to her husband and her life in Ukraine, however, for now, she views this job offer as a very good career opportunity and therefore, her aspiration at the moment, is to try to succeed in this job position. Besides that she uses this opportunity to self-realise herself, her aspiration and thought behind this choice are also related to the fact that she can function as a safety net for her family back in Ukraine. This is not only in terms of being able to support them financially, but also regarding her, being a reference point to Denmark, so she can accommodate them, if the war should be prolonged and they are forced to flee:

> *"Int: Have you reflected on, in terms of like your plans? But you want to go back?*
> *IP: I want to go back, yes … All my life is in my home city. My husband is there, my family is there.. My friends, I have a very nice accommodation there - a very nice big flat. We have our summer house and car and everything.*
>
> *Int: Yeah. So as soon as you can?*
> *IP: Absolutely, I was happy and satisfied with my life in Ukraine. So, if it would be safe. Yeah, I would, for sure go back. Yeah. And sometimes I think maybe I should return, but again, my salary is the most stable at the moment compared to the other people of my family [LAUGHS].*
>
> *Int: Yeah.*
> *IP: So, I feel responsible for being safe for, if they need some money for …*
>
> *Int: So, you also can support them?*
>
> *IP: To welcome them here in case if anything happens.."* **(Maria, l. 621-633)**

Maria finds herself in a limbo situation because, as she expresses here, all of her life is in her home city in Ukraine. However, her current priority is to be able to support her family financially, due to her more stable income and to be able to protect them in Denmark, if something happens. However, this choice of being a "safe haven" and being able to self-realise herself through her career in Denmark, does not come without a price. When it comes to her individual order of identification regarding her feeling of belonging and quality of life, she describes: *"I didn't feel safe, but, you know, somehow, I felt more alive in Ukraine. Yeah, it's nice here, and my job is absolutely stunning"* (Maria, l. 185).

However, at this moment she choose to pay this price to pursue her career aspiration, given this opportunity to advance herself within her field *(Maria, l. 214-216).* She describes that she was able to be offered this position, because she has a very high expertise within the field, the company was recruiting employees for:

> *"Int: What did you do in Ukraine?*
>
> *IP: So, in Ukraine I was working mainly as a project coordinator for NGOs, jobs related to the private and public sectors. [...]*
>
> *Int: So, a lot of different activities, different fields.*
>
> *IP: When they ask what do you know our working procedures? And I was like, okay and started telling them. Finally, they said: 'oh, you know, so much more than we know!' I was like: 'no, definitely not, but I do know some'[...]*
>
> *Int: So, you are doing what you did in Ukraine or is the position kind of the same?*
>
> *IP: Yes, very similar, very similar. I had all the relevant experience. I just needed to be told how exactly this works here and how you do all this via this process. How do you do*
>
> *this, like this kind of process in Denmark. And again, I was very lucky because in my company they consider themselves to be very international because they want to become more and more international. They have a lot of experts, like people from around Europe"* (Maria, l. 193-211).

For Maria, her institutionalised cultural capital, namely her educational and working experience are validated by the Danish company and can be almost directly converted and used in her new social setting in Denmark. However, she needs to modify her cultural capital to some extent, so she can re-produce her expert knowledge and adjust it according to the new Danish context she is operating in. Furthermore, her educational and working background is being validated, due to the symbolic power her previous working position entails. In addition, the Danish company states that Maria possesses a superior level of understanding, that even surpasses their own in the field.

Maria acknowledges that perceives herself in a privileged position, upon receiving this career opportunity, compared to the majority of Ukrainians in Denmark who work in low-skilled jobs:

*"Yeah ... they are cleaning dishes and everything, yeah. So, I have a nice job; I can't complain because it's like it's very nice to have a job. It's much better than not having a job. Yeah. Because the "kommune" (Danish for municipality) sends you for this "praktik" (Danish for internship) that are not paid. They pay you just the social benefits and you can't refuse to go into this praktik. It doesn't depend on if you like it or if you don't like it. You could be offered to wash cars"* (Maria: l. 246-251).

Maria's position in the Danish society, in comparison to other Ukrainians, can be related to Bourdieu's notions of an individual's positioning within the social space one inhabits. Accordingly, her combination of forms of capital (mostly dominated by her cultural capital and her symbolic capital), places her in a more privileged position than other Ukrainians within the Danish host society. Thus, as Hunkler et al. (2022) argue, studying class becomes relevant in a forced migration context because refugees are indeed positioned in classes, as in this example where Maria's positioning within the social space, makes her social mobility possible through the pursuit of her career aspiration.

## 4.4. Negotiating identity

In this section, we analyse in-depth Maria's perception of her social identity in relation to the categorisation "refugee" and how it impacts and shapes her interactions with members of the Danish society. Therefore, we examine the potential challenges that individuals may face when perceived and treated as a refugee, which as discussed below in some cases is against the individual's own identity and perception, and its implications for their social and emotional well-being.

While Irina, Olga, Eva and Julija do not perceive their refugee status as a barrier in connection to their settlement and navigation in an unfamiliar place, this issue was a key theme in our interview with Maria. For her, the categorisation of "refugee" is perceived as problem. She explains that she cannot agree to be considered a refugee:

*"See, refugee you imagine the person who had some reasons to change his residence country and he has no intention to come back unless something changes dramatically.*

*Yeah. So this person he or she is planning they arrival here. There's some understanding, that at least for several years, they will be staying here in this country and they should find their place and to like… integrate. [...] And the problem it's not that we don't want to integrate, but sometimes...when you think that you should integrate… it is when you want to stay very long and if you're not going to stay really long, I would say you should cooperate, you should follow the rules. [...] Yeah. When you try to integrate, you somehow think about it as: 'I should integrate because I want Danish passport and I'm planning my future in this country. And if I am a refugee, I refused from my motherland, because of some really important reasons", so if you refused it, you chose to stay here"* (Maria, l. 585-606).

Despite the reason that Maria and her family fled their home because of the ongoing war, Maria does not view herself or her family as refugees. She believes her situation is something temporary and that does not correspond with her identity. However, Maria does not identify herself within the categorisation of refugees and defines her situation as temporary. Moreover, she claims that in her experience, refugee categorisation has been a crucial factor in imposing barriers to her staying in Denmark. According to her, the issues with the bureaucratic system that she and her family have encountered, started from the very beginning, while they were crossing the Danish border, she connects this situation with the way how people perceive them, she notes:

*"[...] Perhaps, because we are not refugees and we needed this separate specific approach. And I can't blame anyone, that the system wasn't set up for this process. I don't know how it is right now or how it was during summertime. But in the beginning, it was like starting from the border: "You should apply for asylum" And I said: "But why?" and they said: "Because we say so." "But we don't want to apply for asylum and all that" and they said: "Then we can't help you" [...]"* (Maria, l. 366-375).

Here, this situation corresponds with Jenkins' (2014) idea of how simplification of judgment through the use of stereotypes is inherent in institutionalization, as he notes, as well as that it can be seen in bureaucratic organizations (Jenkins, 2014, pp. 192-193). Furthermore, Maria expresses her frustration with the way she and her family have been pursued to apply for asylum by the authorities, which they didn't want to do, only because they were automatically categorised by them as refugees. Thus, the use of stereotypes in this case is in contradiction to

Maria's identity and the fact that she does not identify herself as belonging within the group of refugees in the legal sense. This also leads to negative consequences, along with a lack of discretionary exceptions and a lack of understanding of the unique needs and experiences of individuals, as Maria explains. In this sense, she perceives the categorisation of a refugee as a barrier in the sense that it leads to a simplified and rigid approach to handling individuals' cases.

Another issue related to refugee categorization affected negatively Maria's social interaction in the working place. After she started her new job, she found that her colleagues were nice and very supportive. However, she also feels like from the very beginning there was a different attitude towards her, she mentions: "[...] *I suppose from the beginning when I joined, they were expecting me to, I don't know, cry or something like this. And they were very ready that I.. And when my family left in June…"* (Maria, l. 506-508)**.** She explains further that one day during lunch at work with her colleagues, she was talking on the phone with her family who in that time had a very challenging journey going back to Ukraine. As she was talking on the phone, she felt very emotional and depressed and her colleagues noticed that, she adds: " [...] *And they were.. the feeling was that they were waiting for me to go. 'Okay, okay. Sure. You should go, you should go'. So actually, I cried only after I left the building"* (Maria, l 516-518). After she felt better, she returned to the building, however, she was negatively surprised, because of her colleagues' decision to call two other Ukrainian employees "to help Maria". She notes:

> *"[...]. And we are looking at each other and I say 'I'm okay. How are they supposed to help me?' [Ironically] And the other colleague was like 'I have found the hotline to a psychologist. You should call him right now'. [...] And as I knew I was scheduled for an introduction with the I.T. Department and I said:"I'm just going to join them. It's okay" [Insisting manner]"* (Maria, l. 523-528).

Here, Maria describes a situation in which her colleagues' over-supportiveness led to confusion: *"[...] it was over-supportive, it was pushing and it was not comfortable* [...]"* (Maria, l. 530). Furthermore, several days after the situation Maria got contacted by the municipality, thinking that this is a normal procedure, however instead of that she had a peculiar encounter with the municipality worker who also wanted to talk to her about her colleagues and their concerns about Maria's well being. In relation to the situation, Maria claims that the main issue

has been the perception her colleagues have towards her: *"Because they had some image of it, in their minds and like... they expected me to be depressed, so. Okay. But it was really not that adequate, I'd say" (Maria, l.* 543-544). In that sense, Maria explains that her colleagues do not treat her for "who she is" but their behaviour seem to be dictated by the stereotype of the certain "image", as she mentions, of what a refugee is supposed to be like. As Jenkins (2014) notes, stereotyping is an example of categorisation and classification processes, related to how individuals are grouped or labeled, also stereotyping can be seen as constructed perception formed from a certain point of view (Jenkins, 2014, p. 156). Hence, they expect her to behave in a certain way, as well as expect her to be emotionally fragile, based on the assumption that as a refugee she might be in need of extra support. In the particular situation, that leads to Maria being seen through the lens of the stereotype and not through her personal characteristics, as she notes: *"I really want to be perceived as an equal colleague. But on the other side, I'm very grateful for their support [...]"* (Maria, l. 568-569).

Maria's experience highlights the negative consequences of stereotyping, which may be driven by societal expectations and norms around how refugees should behave, as well as that in her case her identity does not fit into the category she has been assigned to.

Furthermore, she explains that these circumstances have resulted in her changing her behaviour:

> *"I try... I try my best not to show any negative emotions at work. So, if I want to cry, I go to the toilet. Go there and cry for several minutes, then just wash my face, put my smile on. It's not that my smile is not sincere. It is sincere. But all the time you need to, how to say ...to correspond to the situation you are in" (*Maria, l. 563-566).

Here, Maria's quote resonates with Jenkins' (2014) notions of conformity and conformism, based on Mead's and Goffman's work, and suggests that conformism is mainly driven by two motivations: *"the desire to be correct, and the desire to remain in the good graces of others"* (Jenkins, 2014, p. 152). The latter, he also relates to the processes of identification and internalisation. Moreover, he claims that an "insecure membership may thus encourage conforming behaviour" (ibid.). Accordingly, in order to internalise the expectations of her colleagues, Maria has modified her behaviour by suppressing her negative emotions, putting on a facade of positivity, to the point where this has become a part of her habitual routine. Hence, through conformistic behaviour, she is trying to navigate and adapt to the environment, as well as to resist and negotiate her social identity, in order to maintain good relationship with

others and to ensure that she perceived as equal. Conformism, as Jenkins notes, results from whatever is thought to be sensible response to the demands of the situation.

### 4.2.4 Summary of Chapter II

The second chapter of the analysis, demonstrated the significant role of social capital and its convertability as a tool for our participants to navigate their settlement process. The examples discussed, based on the stories of Irina, Julija, Eva, Olga and Maria, demonstrate how Ukrainian refugees, through their social networks or via intermediaries have the opportunity to access resources and support in the host country. This includes access to information, accommodation, employment, and assistance with navigating the bureaucratic processes associated with settlement notes that social capital can exert a multiplier effect on other forms of capital. Overall, social capital can be seen as a facilitator of resources for refugees, making it easier for them to navigate the challenges of settlement and integration into a new society.

Furthermore, this chapter has shown how the participants navigate their settlement process by attempting to pursue their individualised aspirations in obtaining self-realisation. Thus, resisting the lack of individual approaches they are facing when encountering the obligatory integration apparatus, which infiltrates the job centres' approaches towards refugees' affiliation to the job market. These approaches, as highlighted in this chapter, compromise the framework of some of the women's capabilities to aspire, as we for example see in the case of Julija and Eva. As demonstrated in the analysis, the women navigate these structural constraints through their aspirations, and in the attempt of doing so they are trying to convert and validate their different forms of cultural resources and symbolic capital.

In addition to presenting how one's class position can affect refugees' settlement processes, we have demonstrated how in the context of the complex situation in Maria's working place, she had to modify her behaviour, in order to resist her identity, as well as driven also by the desire to maintain good relationships with others. Thus, it is demonstrated how the social labelling of being a refugee, led to Maria's conformist behaviour, which she employs in order to negotiate her social identity, and be perceived as equal, while navigating the new environment.

## 5. Conclusion

Our desire to examine Ukrainian female refugees' subjective experiences originates from our interest in the seldom reaction displayed by the European Union towards the large refugee influx and the EU's prompt actions for activating the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for Ukrainian displaced persons fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As Denmark has oped-out from EU legal issues, the country implemented a separate Danish Special Act, which secures Ukrainians the right to apply for immediate temporary protection. Thus, it is interesting to analyse how these speeded-up procedures of granting Ukrainians temporary protection affect our participants' encounters with the Danish apparatus and its practices in relation to their settlement process. Furthermore, another main concern in this thesis has been to investigate how the willingness to help, in the context of the general welcoming attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees across Europe, has affected our participants' reception experience in the Danish host society.

The findings of the research demonstrate that our participants have primarily encountered positive attitudes in relation to their reception in Denmark as well as high level of societal solidarity towards them, thus being recognised by the Danish host society (Honneth, 1995). The majority of them have been accommodated by host families that have welcomed them into their homes as well as have provided them with essential needs and practical assistance for settling in Denmark. Moreover, some of our participants have received various help from volunteers. Subsequently, for some participants, these more formalised relations have further developed into close friendships. These connections, as argued, have served as a foundation for the establishment of a sense of belonging, as in the case of Julija.

The societal recognition contributes to the women's overall positive perceptions of their lives in Denmark. Based on our findings, our participants' subjective experiences are highly influenced by the solidarity they have encountered within the Danish society and this has also fostered their sense of belonging in Denmark. In addition, our participants had the chance to build caring friendships as well as to increase what Honneth refers to as self-worth. Hence, this has been transformed into a solid basis for our participants to strengthen their capacity to pursue their aspirations.

Furthermore, despite showing gratitude towards the Danish civil society for helping them in their settlement process, an important theme that resonates in all of our participants' responses

is their frustration over the prolonged bureaucratic processes. This, they assume, is due to the number of Ukrainians waiting in line for the services provided by the municipalities in relation to their settlement and integration.

The stories of our interviewees demonstrate several examples of how the Danish integration apparatus, which functions locally in the respective municipalities, has not been prepared for the Ukrainian refugee wave coming to Denmark. In this sense, this may be an indicator that the restrictive reforms implemented to the laws regarding refugee integration, introduced in recent years in Denmark, have weakened the effectiveness of the protection framework the Danish system has to offer. Therefore, it lacked the necessary measures to address the large refugee influx caused by the war adequately. Additionally, the lack of access to basic social services upon arrival (guaranteed by the Special Act), as several of our participants have experienced, therefore risks jeopardising their level of legal recognition. Moreover, the women also accounted for the lack of an individualised approach when interacting with "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 2010). Consequently, we argue that not taking their individual concerns into account compromises their recognition of their legal rights.

Furthermore, our analysis demonstrates that the lack of an individual approach is not only related to their legal rights. Following the understanding of Nina Gren's notion of "living bureaucratisation", we have disclosed how several of our participants encountered challenges dealing with the framework of Danish integration practices at job centres. Hereby, we argue that there is a limited scope for refugees to pursue individualised aspirations, thereby reducing their ability to reach self-realisation. However, as it has been presented in the analysis, some of our participants, despite the limited scope for them to utilise their capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), yet navigate their settlement and integration process through their aspirations. Thus, resisting the structural constraints of the Danish practises regarding refugees' labour market integration.

Drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the different forms of embodied capital, we explore how the various resources that our interviewees have at their disposal help them to navigate their new environment. Analysing their economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, in the context of their settlement process in Denmark, it can be argued that these forms of capital play a crucial role in their ability to integrate into their host country and overcome the challenges

they face. Furthermore, we have followed Umut Erel's understanding of how to apply the study of class and forms of capital in a migration context. Thus, we have argued that our participants strategise to convert, as well as to validate their institutionalised cultural capital and symbolic capital, in order to pursue their aspirations. Furthermore, our findings show that their social capital has been convertible in relation to ease their flight to Denmark, through friends or intermediaries who also facilitated their settlement.

Moreover, despite the individual agency that unfolds when pursuing these aspirations, it can also be stressed that societal recognition strengthens our participants' self-confidence and motivation to aspire. For instance, as presented in Olga's case, the social support she received kept her from losing hope thus she still views Denmark as a country full of possibilities. In this sense, the social recognition, to some extent, outweighs the difficulties she is facing in connection to the slow bureaucratic procedures at the job centre.

However, it has not been a necessity for all of our participants to resist bureaucratised integration practices. Maria's experience shows this, as she promptly after arriving, had the possibility to secure a suitable job in Denmark, matching her skills. Moreover, Irina's case, is an example of how the sense of temporariness can affect one's aspirations to reach self-realisation in the host society. Despite the fact that she does not aim to self-realise herself in Denmark and hereby attain upward social mobility, she still negotiates her refugee identity by being active in the job market.

Utilizing Borselli & Van Meijl perspective (2020), as previously mentioned in the theoretical chapter, through the lens of our participants' aspirations, we aim to shed light on the significance of refugees active role in shaping their integration prospects within the host society. Borselli & Van Meijl emphasise that integration policies often concentrate on the efffective adaptation, assimilation and acculturation of refugees, according to their new social setting in the host society. Thus, insufficient focus is being given to refugees and their identification with the receiving society, as well as how their agency unfolds while participating in the host community (ibid., 581). Using the IPA, we acknowledge that our findings cannot be generalised. However, we argue that our findings contribute to the understanding of how this particular group of highly skilled female Ukrainian refugees navigate their conditions through their aspirations within a Danish context. Respectively, this thesis can contribute with an awareness of how the structural constraints posed by bureaucracy and standardised

integration procedures, along with the lack of individual approach towards refugees' situations, can both jeopardise refugees' legal recognition as well as compromise their self-realisation. Hence, our research can contribute to the debate on whether if the obligations of this "integration contract" outweigh its values as well as if the restrictive policies implemented in recent years, have gone too far, leaving no space for individualised aspirations and hereby limiting in general refugees' capacity to aspire in the Danish context.

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