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Contingent on paradoxical policies: migrants' trajectories to permanent residence and skilled care work in Denmark

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ABSTRACT

Syrian refugees and Ukrainian labour migrants are among the increasing number of migrants in Denmark who have enrolled in training programmes to become skilled care workers in response to the Danish state's initiatives to increase labour supply for public-sector elderly care. However, stricter immigration legislation together with regulations concerning state-financed education complicate training, employment and residence for these migrants. This article explores how the Danish welfare state's conflicting interests in and attempts at pursuing both a strict immigration policy and securing enough trained care workers in eldercare affect trajectories to skilled care work among foreign nationals residing in Denmark. Based on data from long-term ethnographic fieldwork, we demonstrate how in various ways Syrian and Ukrainian care work trainees with temporary residence face a double-sided uncertainty, as their lives in Denmark are contingent on events and decisions out of their control, such as amendments to immigration and educational policies and legislation. On the one hand, these events and decisions jeopardize the migrant trainees' and their families' future in Denmark. On the other hand, they offer opportunities to make new connections and acquire new knowledge and skills, which in the longer run may contribute to improving their lives in Denmark.

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Introduction

Foreign migrants are the subject of much legislative focus in Denmark. Although some legislation offers arriving migrants hope for a future in their new country, most is designed to deter the 'wrong kind' of migrants from settling in Denmark (Bendixsen and Näre 2024; Floros and Jørgensen 2020; Rytter 2023). At the same time, authorities and employers regard foreign nationals residing in Denmark as a potential source of labour for the care sector. Denmark, like other countries in the Global North, urgently needs more skilled care workers. By 2035, public-sector eldercare is projected to face a shortage of at least 15,000 skilled care workers, which corresponds to approximately

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25 percent of the skilled care workers currently employed in the sector (Finansministeriet 2023; Social-, Bolig-og Ældreministeriet 2024). Consequently, the government has implemented legislation on education and the labour market that aims to facilitate the recruitment and training of foreign nationals residing in Denmark (what we term 'resident migrants'[1]), and both national and local state actors have designed policies and implemented activities reflecting this agenda (Kjeldsen 2023; Rostgaard 2015; Sparre et al. 2024). Simultaneously, with the introduction of a so-called 'paradigm shift', the Danish government has restricted access to welfare services and to permanent residence for refugees and migrants with temporary residence permits. The 'paradigm shift' refers to a number of changes in legislation and administrative procedures enacted since 2015, and reflects a general shift from a state strategy of integration to a state strategy of repatriation and deportation. Consequently, migrants with temporary residence permits, which can include those granted asylum, migrants who are residents on the basis of family reunification with a refugee, and to some extent also labour migrants, now experience the kind of temporariness and uncertainty that were previously only experienced by asylum seekers (Poulsen 2023; Rytter et al. 2023).

Denmark is like other countries in the Global North caught in the 'liberal paradox' 'between economic forces that propel toward greater openness (to maximize material wealth and economic security) and political forces that seek a higher degree of closure (to protect the *demos*, maintain the integrity of the community, and preserve the social contract)' (Hollifield 2004, 900). Danish state policies reflect this paradox. On the one hand, legislation and state-sponsored support schemes and initiatives aim to improve the employability of individuals from the pool of resident migrants (including those with only temporary residence) and recruit them into care work. On the other hand, strict immigration policies may lead to people with temporary residence believing they risk being deported, which may discourage them from pursuing further education, skilled employment and permanent residence in Denmark.

This article explores how the Danish welfare state's conflicting interests and attempts to pursue both a strict immigration policy and to secure enough trained care workers affect resident migrants' trajectories to skilled care work. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out from 2021 to 2023, we focus on the experiences and strategies of Syrian refugees with temporary residence permits and Ukrainian labour migrants with temporary residence permits as they train to become either social and healthcare helpers (in Danish, *social- og sundhedshjælpere* – which one qualifies as on completing a one-and-a-half-year basic caregiver training programme aimed at providing personal and practical help), or social and healthcare assistants (in Danish, *social- og sundhedsassistenter* – which one qualifies as on completing a 3-year assistant-nurse training programme). We refer to both types of trainees as 'care work trainees'. The programmes are run by social and healthcare colleges and comprise both classroom teaching and practical workplace training.

To understand the consequences of conflicting welfare state policies for the individual care work trainee, we ask: How do refugees with temporary residence permits and labour migrants with temporary residence permits experience and balance the conflicting demands, expectations and ambitions on their trajectories to becoming skilled care workers in Denmark? How do they experience and handle the uncertainty related to their residence and their financial security after they begin their care work training?

Inspired by the literature on migration and care work, we focus on the interplay between global and national labour and mobility, and on intimate, everyday care practices (see, e.g. Buch 2015; Hansen, Dahl, and Horn 2021; Wrede and Näre 2013). A growing number of studies explore the experiences of migrant women employed in eldercare, either in private homes (Bahna and Sekulová 2019; Degiuli 2007) or under insecure and unfavourable contracts with homecare agencies (Buch 2018; Coe 2019). These studies show that migrant women with moderate educational attainments from low-income countries are particularly vulnerable to poverty, marginalisation and discrimination, because of low salaries and precarious working conditions. Also, restrictions on migrants' legal status and on their access to residence and work permits often trap these women in poorly paid and exploitative jobs and limit their opportunity to benefit from qualifications and work experience they may have (Buch 2015, 286; Näre and Silva 2021).

In Denmark, the labour market for care workers is more institutionalised and regulated than in most European and North American countries. Since the 1960s, homecare and residential care services have been provided by a formal and professional long-term care system, where the main responsibility for organising, providing and financing eldercare lies with the public sector (Rostgaard et al. 2022). Furthermore, for decades, the state has ensured a supply of skilled care workers through programmes run by social and healthcare colleges (Kamp and Hvid 2012). Unlike the care workers employed by families or through private companies in many other countries, care workers and care work trainees in Denmark are covered by a collective agreement and have rights regarding the working environment, dismissal, working hours, vacation and pensions. Thus relatively speaking, the care work trainees in our study are more privileged than migrant care workers outside Denmark/the Nordic countries. Nonetheless, the stricter immigration legislation in Denmark in recent years has had an impact on their everyday lives and prospects, as we will show.

Inspired by Susan Whyte and Godfrey Siu's concept of 'contingency' (Whyte and Siu 2015), we show how migrants' trajectories to skilled work in public-sector eldercare are contingent on contemporary restrictions and opportunities in the Danish welfare state and thus characterised by a double-sided uncertainty. Whyte and Siu define contingency as a particular form of uncertainty that comprises risk and danger, and hope and opportunity, which invites us to consider people's relationships with and dependencies on 'people, institutions, happenings, circumstances' (Whyte and Siu 2015, 19). Our analysis demonstrates how migrant care work trainees with temporary residence face a double-sided uncertainty: their lives in Denmark are contingent on events and decisions out of their control, such as amendments to legislation on immigration or education. On the one hand, these events and decisions jeopardise the futures of the migrant trainees and their families in Denmark. On the other, they offer opportunities to make new connections and acquire new knowledge and skills, which in the longer run may contribute to improving their lives in Denmark.

Below, we elaborate on the administrative and legal paradoxes navigated by migrants who aspire to become skilled care workers in Denmark. Following this, we present our theoretical and conceptual framework, our methods and our ethnographic material. Our analysis foregrounds six Syrian and Ukrainian care work trainees. We show how factors such as migrant status, country of origin, gender and social networks intersect with policies and legislation and form the migrants' experiences and trajectories.

Paradoxes in the recruitment of migrant care workers

The labour shortage in Danish public-sector eldercare is becoming increasingly acute. The reason is threefold: first, the number of older adults who need care is increasing, particularly in rural and suburban areas; second, many care workers retire, or leave the profession due to dissatisfaction with their working conditions or to burnout (Larsen and Jakobsen 2022; Sparre et al. 2023); and third, for decades, social and healthcare colleges have seen a drop in enrolment and high dropout rates (Vinge and Topholm 2021).

In Denmark, as in other Nordic countries, growing numbers of migrants work in public-sector eldercare (Isaksen 2011; Kurki, Brunila, and Lahelma 2019; Sparre et al. 2024; Theobald 2011). This has been accompanied by national and local agreements and initiatives that reflect a state strategy aimed at intensifying the recruitment of migrants residing in Denmark into care work. In 2016, the Danish government introduced a new integration programme aimed at improving the employability and educational attainment of refugees and family reunification migrants aged 18–50. The integration programme includes both classroom teaching and unsalaried internships. These internships are often offered by the municipalities, which use the internships to recruit, among others, unskilled workers and potential care work trainees for municipal eldercare services (Kjeldsen 2023). Furthermore, with financial support from the central state administration, the social and healthcare colleges and municipalities have launched preparatory courses aimed at improving migrants' Danish language skills and increasing their knowledge about the care work profession and the Danish labour market. Social and healthcare colleges have also introduced a course during the first part of their educational programmes that provides extra Danish language support for trainees with migrant backgrounds.[2]

Despite the above measures aimed at helping migrants to qualify as care workers, many migrants aspiring to become skilled care workers encounter legislative and administrative barriers to educational advancement, employment and residence in Denmark. Until 2024, if a migrant possessed a higher education qualification from their country of origin, they would be at a disadvantage when applying for a preparatory course. Municipalities often rejected applicants with higher education qualifications, as financial assistance from the central state administration was only provided for those with upper secondary education or lower. For many applicants, this presented a catch-22 situation: they did not have adequate Danish language skills to enter one of the social and healthcare training programmes, but their application to a preparatory course was rejected because they had a degree, even though they could not use their degree in Denmark.

Furthermore, all trainees with a temporary residence permit are affected by a 'paradigm shift' in Danish immigration and refugee policy. Before the 'paradigm shift', temporary residence was granted with a view to the granting of permanent residence status and promised the prospect of a life and future in Denmark (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielsen 2017; Poulsen 2023). Migrants with temporary residence were encouraged to seek employment, pursue further education and language instruction, and to become involved in community activities, to demonstrate their willingness and ability to 'integrate' into Danish society. Eventually, they would be granted permanent residence and possibly Danish citizenship (Poulsen 2023), although, as Rytter (2019) has noted, the concept of integration is based on widespread perceptions of a persistent gap between Danish majorities and immigrant minorities. With the 'paradigm shift', the state has

shifted to a strategy of repatriation or deportation, although migrants are still expected to integrate. Thus migrants with temporary residence permits are confronted with two simultaneous and conflicting demands: they are expected to do their best to integrate, while having to remain ready to leave at any time, owing to the constant threat of deportation. These conflicting demands have several consequences for all care work trainees with temporary residence permits.

Two types of trainees with temporary residence permits are particularly vulnerable to the conflicting demands of integration and readiness to be deported: those who came to Denmark as asylum seekers and those who came to Denmark through family reunification with a refugee. This is one consequence of the Danish 'paradigm shift', which is based on a new reading and interpretation of the UN Refugee Convention. Before 2015, an asylum seeker was granted asylum and residence as refugee according to section 7 of the Danish Aliens Act, with either 'convention status' (section 7.1) or 'protected status' (section 7.2). In 2015, 'temporary protected status' (section 7.3) was added. Refugees holding residence permits under the terms of section 7.2 (protected status) are at risk of having their residence permits withdrawn, and this applies even more for residence permits under the terms of section 7.3 (temporary protected status), a status often granted to individuals who seek family reunification with a refugee (Rytter et al. 2023). Every year or every second year – or whenever the Danish immigration authorities consider it appropriate to do so – the residence eligibility of individuals holding residence permits under the terms of sections 7.2 and 7.3 is re-evaluated. If the authorities assess the circumstances in the country of origin as having improved, the residence permit will be withdrawn, and the individual risks deportation. Thus, in many ways, temporary residence resembles the asylum-seeking phase in terms of uncertainty, temporariness and the risk of deportation. Poulsen (2023) has termed this a 'loop of continuing case assessment'.

A second consequence of the paradigm shift is that persons whose residence depends on their partner's residence permit are also particularly vulnerable. If they divorce, they risk losing their residence permit and they may risk deportation (Liversage 2023). This applies both to individuals whose residence permit has been granted on the basis of family reunification with a refugee and others whose residence permit is tied to their partner's residence permit. A third consequence of the paradigm shift is that it is now more difficult to qualify for permanent residence. When applying for permanent residence, migrants can no longer include time spent in studies, training and part-time jobs to meet the employment requirements of their application (Poulsen 2023). Applicants must document they have had 3.5 years of fulltime employment in Denmark in the 4 years preceding their application, which they can submit after at least 8 years of residence based on a temporary residence permit.

Thus when migrants attempt to enter the field of skilled care work, they encounter paradoxical legislation and procedures at the intersection between flexible labour market policies and immigration control, and at the intersection between integration and deportation.

Uncertainty and contingency

Migrants and refugees often face acute and protracted concerns related to basic needs, to relatives and to their future prospects. Migration scholars have described these

concerns in various ways. Many scholars highlight uncertainty as a governing element and a norm, rather than as an exception in migrants' and refugees' everyday lives (Horst and Grabska 2015; Whyte 2011). Furthermore, questions of time and temporariness are emphasised as important aspects of refugees' lives, especially in the asylum-seeking phase, when refugees are at a stage of uncertain waiting; they experience being socially stagnated and 'out of time', both in relation to their own biography and the rest of society (Griffith 2014; Jakobsen, Karlsen, and Khosravi 2020). Migration and labour market studies discuss the concepts of precarity and hyper-precarity. Discussions of precarity primarily focus on how precarious work in global capitalism affects migrant workers (Schierup and Jørgensen 2017; Strauss 2018), and how stricter immigration policies in the Global North contribute to insecure life and working conditions (Floros and Jørgensen 2020; Jørgensen 2016). Hyper-precarity emphasises how the entanglement of immigration and labour regimes produces layered insecurities and vulnerabilities. These existential, socio-legal, spatial and financial insecurities and vulnerabilities shape all aspects of refugees' everyday lives and planning (Lewis et al. 2015; Shapiro and Egaa Jørgensen 2021).

The care work trainees with temporary residence presented in our study also experience uncertainty about their education, employment and residence permits. However, they are enrolled in a formal, state-financed training programme and employed by a Danish municipality, which means that, unlike migrants and refugees with more precarious lives and working conditions, they have access to welfare state resources and people that may help them. Thus, care work trainees with temporary residence in Denmark find themselves in a state of double-sided uncertainty that is simultaneously promising and unsettling. In this article, we draw on a conceptualisation of uncertainty that builds on the anthropological tradition of studying experiences of uncertainty (Douglas 2001; Jenkins, Jessen, and Steffen 2005; Whyte 1997, 2005), and in particular on Susan Whyte and Godfrey Siu's work among people infected with HIV in Uganda (2015). We employ Whyte and Siu's (2015) concept of contingency, as this concept invites us to examine the double-sidedness of our interlocutors' positions by asking them on what or whom their lives are contingent:

> [Contingency] is about discerning and trying out various possibilities, while recognizing their temporary, undetermined nature. It requires recognizing relationships, dependencies, and conditions that mediate what is important to you for better or for worse. The uncertainty lies in the inability to predict the conditions on which you are dependent. (Whyte and Siu 2015, 28–29)

Contingency implies a relationality that reflects the double-sided uncertainty. We show how our interlocutors' experiences and strategies reflect exactly this kind of uncertainty, which comprises risk and danger, as well as hope and opportunity.

Data and methods

The article is based on ethnographic data material from a 3-year research project (2021–2024) on the recruiting and training of resident migrant care workers for Danish eldercare. The project was a collaboration with two social and healthcare colleges and three municipalities in South-Western Jutland and Greater Copenhagen. We carried out ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation of and semi-

structured interviews and conversations with 73 care work trainees from 30 countries at social and healthcare colleges, and in municipal homecare and nursing homes. Most of the trainees were in their 30s or 40s, and 62 of the 73 trainees were women. Their educational and employment backgrounds varied. We interviewed 46 of the 73 trainees at least once about their migration history, motivation and experiences with training as care workers, and their thoughts about the future. Additionally, we interviewed 50 teachers, practice supervisors and managers about their experiences with various groups of care work trainees and care workers. All interlocutors gave their written informed consent, and the project was approved by VIVE's Research Ethics Committee (journal no.: 2024/1).

In the analysis for this article, we draw on the experiences of 15 care work trainees in South-Western Jutland from Syria and Ukraine, of whom 12 are women and three are men. We focus on Syrians and Ukrainians because we want to explore and compare the experiences and circumstances of two different migrant groups holding temporary residence permits in Denmark; first, refugees, and individuals who are residents on the basis of family reunification with a refugee, and second, labour migrants, and individuals who are residents on the basis of family reunification with a labour migrant.[3] Since 2013, Syrians have been the largest group of foreign nationals applying for asylum and granted refugee status in Denmark,[4] and in our sample, trainees from Syria are the largest group of trainees with a refugee background. The arrival of refugees from Syria has spurred much debate in Danish society and was one of the main reasons for the 'paradigm shift' in Danish immigration legislation. Ukrainians are one of the largest groups of non-EU labour migrants in Denmark, and in our study, they represent the single largest group of migrant trainees. We focus on Syrian and Ukrainian migrant trainees residing in South-Western Jutland because this region represents one of the rural and suburban areas in Denmark that is experiencing a significant and growing labour shortage driven by the region's increasing number of older citizens. At the same time, South-Western Jutland has both seen an increase in Eastern European labour migrants in recent decades (Larsen 2023) and has received many Syrians, who have been assigned to rural and suburban municipalities by the Danish government (Larsen 2011). Consequently, the social and healthcare college and the two municipalities in our study are at the forefront of initiatives to recruit and train care workers from the resident migrant population in Denmark.

The trainees from Syria arrived in Denmark between 2013 and 2017, fleeing from the Syrian civil war and either seeking asylum or gaining residence through family reunification schemes. None of the Syrian trainees in our study have permanent residence. The trainees from Ukraine came to Denmark through work and apprentice contracts with Danish farmers, or through reunification with a partner employed in agriculture between 2009 and 2017. For various reasons, many of the Ukrainian trainees have not obtained permanent residence. All the Syrian and Ukrainian trainees in this study are in their 30s or 40s, are married, and have children. Their educational levels vary, but many have started or completed studies in fields such as economics, agronomics and teaching, and have several years of work experience in their countries of origin.

Our analysis is based on a close reading and thematic coding of our field notes and interview transcripts. We foreground six trainees from Syria and Ukraine. All the study participants have been given pseudonyms, and some personal information has been changed to ensure anonymity.

Trajectories to skilled work in Danish eldercare

Syrian refugees: from integration programme to care work training

When we met Farida at a nursing home in early 2022, she was training to become a social and healthcare helper. She was in her 40s and from Syria, where she had worked as a schoolteacher before arriving in Denmark in 2015 through family reunification. She and her three children joined her husband, who had sought asylum a year earlier. After completing Danish language school, Farida joined the integration programme and did various short-term internships in kindergartens, cleaning services and supermarkets. Farida found that none of these internships led to employment, like many refugees in Danish integration programmes (Shapiro and Egaa Jørgensen 2021). Farida decided to study for the Danish school-leaving certificate as she wished to qualify for an educational programme in a profession that focussed on working with people. Her caseworker suggested social and healthcare training. By late 2021, Farida had begun the social and healthcare helper training programme. Despite the initial language barriers, she was satisfied with her training and work at a nursing home.

Mahmoud was also training to become a social and healthcare helper when we first met him in 2021. Mahmoud was in his early 40s and had arrived in Denmark in 2015 as an asylum seeker from Syria, where he had worked in retail. Immediately on arriving in Denmark, Mahmoud took Danish language lessons, joined the integration programme, and did unskilled work in agriculture and food manufacturing factories. After a 4-year asylum-seeking process, he was granted temporary residence, and in 2020, his wife and children joined him through the family reunification scheme. Mahmoud wished to train as a skilled worker, but employers declined to offer him internships due to his inadequate Danish language skills. To improve his Danish language and ensure better job conditions, Mahmoud followed his caseworker's advice to earn his Danish school-leaving certificate, and then apply for the social and healthcare helper programme. In 2020, he enrolled at a social and healthcare college, and supplemented his trainee salary by working as a substitute at a nursing home. His wife was unable to work due to illness.

For Farida and Mahmoud, enrolling in social and healthcare training was a means to enter the Danish labour market. Their caseworkers had recommended this route to meet the requirements for integration into Danish society; by working as social and healthcare helpers, Farida and Mahmoud would contribute to the Danish welfare state. However, both struggled with the uncertainty of their residence status.

Farida explained that she had invested emotionally and financially in making a home, and that she and her children were studying in Denmark. Yet, their temporary residence status made planning their future difficult: 'I chose a path. I am enrolled in a training programme to get better job security. But if they [the Danish Immigration Service] call, I don't know what to do'. In 2019, the Danish Immigration Service began to suspend the residence permits of Syrian refugees from the Damascus area, who had received temporary protected status.[5] This happened to one of Farida's classmates who, due to the uncertainty of waiting for the Refugee Appeals Board's decision, found it impossible to concentrate on her studies. Eventually, she dropped out. Farida is not from Damascus, but she feared for her family's future. Soon, she would need to renew her temporary residence permit. Farida cannot apply for permanent residence

until she has finished her studies and worked for 3.5 years, if she still has a valid residence permit at that time. When we met her in 2022, she had nearly a year left of her studies, and her husband had yet to secure a full-time job. 'Sometimes we think that we are not living in safety', she concluded.

Mahmoud had similar concerns, and he wondered why training and part-time employment no longer counted in the employment requirements for permanent residence. When Mahmoud graduated as a social and healthcare helper in 2023, his dream was to continue to nursing school. However, he was concerned about his temporary residence status because 'they [the immigration authorities] continue to tighten the rules'. After graduating, Mahmoud obtained full-time employment as a social and healthcare helper, and started studying for the higher preparatory examination that would allow him to enter nursing school, if and when he obtained permanent residence. Mahmoud tried not to think too much about the uncertainty associated with his and his family's temporary residence. 'If I think about it, I become ill', he noted.

Nabil, another refugee from Syria in his forties, experienced how the requirements for applying for permanent residence were amended while he was training as a social and healthcare assistant. Overnight, employment as part of a traineeship no longer counted as work experience. Like Mahmoud, he aspired to study further to become a nurse, but because his wife was studying, and due to the increased uncertainty about their residence in Denmark, he considered this to be too risky. His sole focus was to work for 3.5 years to become eligible to apply for permanent residence. Nabil has acquaintances who have had their residence permits withdrawn, and even though he keeps telling himself that he and his family will be alright and have done everything they could, the uncertainty persists:

> We are very grateful for the kind welcome we received here in Denmark. We did everything in our power to learn Danish and follow a study programme, but when politicians say that they will send us back, we become nervous and less motivated. I don't think that they will send us back, but it triggers me psychologically.

Although social and healthcare training provided Farida, Mahmoud and Nabil with the opportunity to become skilled workers and work in professions where their labour is needed, and therefore also meet one of many demands of integration, they were all concerned about how this training delayed their eligibility to apply for permanent residence. For Mahmoud and Nabil, this uncertainty was the sole reason they did not pursue further studies.

Unlike care work trainees who are refugees, those from Ukraine did not experience the same urgency in terms of residence. However, as we will show, skilled work and permanent residence are still considered a means of ensuring a future in Denmark.

Ukrainian labour migrants: from unskilled work to care work training

Sofiya was in her late thirties and training to become a social and healthcare assistant when we met her in December 2021. She was one of many Ukrainian care work trainees at the social and healthcare college in Western Jutland. Sofiya arrived in Denmark in 2009 as a newlywed, to join her husband, who worked at a pig farm. She quickly found employment at a mink farm but wanted to improve her Danish and therefore started

working at a kindergarten, where she discovered her passion for working with people. Sofiya applied for a place on a training programme for pedagogical assistants, but this was rejected because of her inadequate Danish language skills. Another Ukrainian woman told her about a salaried preparatory course for Eastern Europeans, and a Danish friend for helped Sofiya with the course application. When applying, Sofiya (who had a degree in economics and marketing from Ukraine) had to 'underreport' the information she gave about her educational qualifications, because municipalities at that time often rejected candidates with a higher education (municipalities only received subsidies for applicants without further education qualifications). Sofiya only disclosed her upper secondary qualifications and suggested that we 'perhaps we should not tell the municipality about this'. These rules were later partly amended due to pressure from unions and employers. Nevertheless, until 2024, access to care work training programmes was contingent on having educational qualifications at no higher than upper secondary school level. This led many care work trainees to be vague about their backgrounds, claiming incomplete degrees in fields such as law, economics or agronomy. Over time, we learned the full extent of their qualifications. Sofiya's application was successful, and she enrolled in the preparatory course. By early 2021, she had started the social and healthcare assistant programme.

Like Sofiya, Ivanna qualified for social and healthcare college through a preparatory course. Ivanna was 24 when she came to Denmark in 2008. Despite her university degree and full-time job in Ukraine, she needed money, and had not seen a bright future for herself. Therefore, she signed an apprentice contract with a Danish farmer. Later, she was employed permanently and worked at the farm for another 6 years, and then at a factory for about 5 years. When we met her, she was in her late 30s.

Sofiya's and Ivanna's trajectories to care work training are like many other Ukrainians who came to Denmark because they or their partner had secured employment or an apprentice contract with a Danish farmer. Since the mid-1990s, Denmark has allowed foreign nationals aged 18–30 to train as agricultural apprentices, primarily to meet the agricultural sector's labour shortage. Typically, these Ukrainians come from small provincial towns and villages, and from working class or lower middle-class families (Skvirskaja 2015). Although these apprenticeships are intended to complement their education (Lovtidende 2022), Ukrainian migrants view them primarily as a means of earning an income, rather than as a form of educational migration (Skvirskaja 2015; Spanger and Andersen 2023). Many of these Ukrainians remain in Denmark after they have completed their agricultural apprenticeship and continue to work at farms or factories.

Unlike in some countries, where, after migration, many migrant women with children leave the workforce to focus on their families (Ho 2006; Ryan et al. 2009), Eastern European women in Denmark tend to remain employed, probably due to the wide availability of affordable childcare in Denmark. In recent years, an increasing number of Eastern European labour migrants in South-Western Jutland have enrolled in social and healthcare training, which can be interpreted as a response to the challenges they have faced as unskilled workers. These women, who often do not have parents nearby to help with childcare, seem to have experienced difficulties in balancing family life with unskilled and physically demanding work in the private sector. Furthermore, the labour migrants' poor Danish language skills prevent them from assisting their children with schoolwork. Thus, by enrolling in social and healthcare training the migrants in our study have seized

an opportunity to improve their Danish language skills, working conditions, work–life balance and job security, despite the uncertainties and restrictions that surround their eligibility for permanent residence.

The uncertainty related to residence status and the 'inability to predict the conditions on which [one is] dependent' (Whyte and Siu 2015, 29) is demonstrated by the story of Sofiya. She knew that as long as she was studying, she was not earning the right to apply for permanent residence. Instead, she had to rely on her husband's permanent residence, which gave her the right to reside in Denmark as his spouse. This in turn made her residence permit contingent on remaining married. However, if Sofiya were to divorce, she could make use of her work experience in the high-demand agricultural sector and reapply for a temporary residence permit on the basis of a work contract with a Danish employer. The uncertainty related to her residence permit and to changing legislation greatly affected Sofiya and her family's life. She said:

> So many people [migrants] do not enter a study programme here, because when you are studying, you cannot apply for [a permanent] residence permit. But actually, we work full-time. We deal with so much, because we have to be at work, study at home, and we also have a family. And then we risk being sent back to our country. I am so relieved that I had a chance to say this aloud!

The statement reflects Sofiya's frustration with legislative changes and the fact that she works full-time, and puts extra effort into schoolwork due to her limited Danish language skills, yet at the same time she feels uncertain about whether she will be allowed to remain in Denmark. Sofiya cannot start earning her right to apply for permanent residence until she has completed the training programme.

Ivanna had similar concerns. Her Ukrainian husband had permanent residence in Denmark and Danish citizenship when she met him in Denmark. Although Ivanna did not like her first jobs at the pig farm and at a factory, and did not improve her Danish language there, she decided to stay at the factory for 5 years to obtain permanent residence. 'I chose residence rather than language', she explained. This was before the couple had children. Ivanna was at a point in her life where she could prioritise earning her eligibility for permanent residence, because she did not have to worry about family logistics.

Anya, another care work trainee, found a shortcut to residence in Denmark. Because she was born in a village that is now part of Poland, Anya could document her Polish birthright to the Polish authorities, resulting in her and her children now having Polish passports. 'Now I'm the most important person in the family [*laughs*], and my husband is with me', she explained, addressing the fact that her husband is dependent on her and her residence status, and not the other way around. Other care work trainees were concerned about the implications of a possible divorce for their future, because their residence was contingent on their marriage.

Contingent trajectories to skilled employment

Being a care work trainee with temporary residence in Denmark is uncertain and contingent on paradoxical immigration and labour market policies. The migrant care work trainees were primarily concerned about whether the Danish authorities would

withdraw their residence permits or grant them permanent residence and a more secure and predictable future in Denmark. All the care work trainees presented in this article have completed basic Danish language lessons, attained a Danish school-leaving certificate, completed first part of the training programme, and were enrolled in or had finished a specialised social and healthcare training programme. Yet their lives and future in Denmark continued to be contingent on an 'event or occurrence about which there is some uncertainty' (Whyte and Siu 2015, 19). The contingency affects both Syrian and Ukrainian care work trainees. We distinguish between the two, because their nationalities – Syrian and Ukrainian – and their arrival as either asylum seekers or labour migrants had, and still has, an impact on their residence status and trajectories to skilled care work and permanent residence.

Farida, Mahmoud, Nabil and other care work trainees from Syria applied for protection as refugees on their arrival in Denmark. They were told that learning Danish, training to do a skilled job in a profession where workers are needed, and obtaining such a job are the best ways to build a permanent life in Denmark. However, changes in policies demonstrate how contingency is shaped by broader political and societal events and decisions (Whyte and Siu 2015, 19–20). Not only do training and part-time employment no longer count as work experience in the Danish permanent residency application requirements, trainees with temporary residence also risk having their residence permit withdrawn because of new and stricter legislation. For Syrian trainees, this risk is omnipresent in letters and warnings from the immigration authorities, in the media's coverage of cases of withdrawn residence permits, and in the trainees' social networks. Training to become a skilled care worker has changed from being a means of achieving a more secure life to being a barrier to, or at best, leading to an even longer trajectory to a more secure life. The migrants in our study strove to finish their training and then work for 3.5 years to earn the right to apply for permanent residence.

Some Syrian care work trainees have opted for the shorter social and healthcare helper training programme to accelerate their entry into the workforce, despite initially aspiring to take a longer education. Others, such as Mahmoud, once they had obtained full-time work as a skilled worker, used their spare time to study for the higher preparatory examination to qualify for nursing school while they were acquiring the necessary years of full-time employment for obtaining permanent residence. However, as Nabil and others noted, uncertainty will continue to affect them psychologically, as their futures depend on political events and decisions beyond their control.

For Ukrainian care work trainees, training to become a skilled care worker is a way to improve their Danish language skills and to find better working conditions, financial security and work–life balance than they previously had as unskilled workers in Denmark. However, educational attainments in Ukraine and their limited Danish language skills, owing to many years of unskilled work alongside other migrants, threatened to obstruct their access to education and training, as in the case of Sofiya.

For both Syrian and Ukrainian care work trainees, contingency is gendered, insofar as the prospects of female trainees appear to be less certain than those of their male counterparts. Most Syrian women arrived in Denmark through family reunification schemes, and have been given 'temporary protected status', which leaves them with weaker protection and a greater risk of having their residence permit withdrawn. Decisions on asylum cases have shown that families risk being separated; the husband keeps his residence

permit, whereas his wife and children have their residence permits withdrawn (Rytter et al. 2023). Among Ukrainian trainees, more women than men are affected by the new rules that exclude professional training from counting as work experience that could qualify them for permanent residence, because many Ukrainian women's residence is dependent on marriage. However, unlike trainees who are refugees, they may have a last resort. If the Ukrainians divorce, they can terminate their education and apply for a residence permit through an agricultural employment contract, on the basis of their qualifications in this field. Moreover, because they have worked in Denmark for many years, many Ukrainians have established bonds with other resident migrants and ethnic majority Danes. As Whyte and Siu have shown, personal relationships and the mutual dependence on which these relationships rely constitute a social contingency that may make an insecure situation more secure (2015, 20–21). While the Syrian trainees were encouraged by case officers or other municipal actors to go 'the care work way', Ukrainian trainees learned about care work study programmes from other migrant workers, and many even received help with their application, schoolwork and trainee assignments from neighbours, friends and family members.

Despite the differences between Syrian and Ukrainian care work trainees, none escape feelings of uncertainty. They are unable to predict the conditions on which they depend, or the short- and long-term consequences of these conditions (Whyte and Siu 2015, 29), despite their attempts to make their situations more secure. Thus the lives and futures of trainees from Syria and Ukraine are contingent on (i) changing immigration policies, which dictate legislation and procedures concerning residence; (ii) changes in educational and employment policies, such as support schemes and initiatives that may either facilitate or obstruct access to the educational system; (iii) changes in Danish national demographics and their effects on labour market demands; and (iv) social relations that may ease access to the educational system, but at the same time create a dependence on other people, such as the female trainees who are heavily dependent on their husbands regarding residence permits. Therefore, the contingency of the trainees' lives reflects a fundamental, double-sided uncertainty. On the one hand, their lives in Denmark are contingent on political events and decisions they cannot control, such as criteria for enrolment in education programmes and eligibility for permanent residence. On the other hand, these same events and decisions may create a window of opportunity for establishing new connections and acquiring new knowledge and skills, which may improve their lives in Denmark in the long run.

The care work trainees' contingent lives, and their experiences and strategies indicate and embody the ambiguous and often conflicting logic and strategies of the Danish welfare state, which like other liberal democracies is caught in the 'liberal paradox' (Hollifield 2004). On the one hand, the state designs and enacts new policies, support schemes and initiatives to ease resident migrants' access to skilled care work, to meet the increased demand for labour in public-sector eldercare. On the other hand, increasingly strict immigration and educational legislation obstruct some migrants' access to permanent residence and education, and thus send the message that despite their efforts, they cannot expect a future as skilled care workers in Denmark. The various forms of state logic and strategies are rooted in the very same concern about the future of the Danish welfare society, which is also why policies change, as exemplified by the amendment of the criteria for enrolment in the preparatory courses. On the one hand, migrants

are seen as draining Denmark's resources and therefore as a threat to welfare state resources (Jöhncke 2011). On the other, migrants are seen as (part of) the solution to the challenge of sustaining the welfare state through their work in public-sector professions. The care work trainees' stories reflect gratitude as well as concern and fear, hence they bear witness to migrants' embodiment of the different state logics and interests. Thus, in Denmark, where care work is a certified and skilled profession, the state presents the most important contingency for migrants, through its ultimate power to either facilitate or obstruct their future as skilled care workers.

Conclusion: welfare state interests and migrants' contingent lives

This article has explored the trajectories to skilled care work among Syrian and Ukrainian care work trainees with temporary residence permits in Denmark, in the framework of the Danish welfare state, and Danish immigration and labour market policies and legislation. Due to their position as both care work trainees and refugees or labour migrants with temporary residence permits, the trainees' lives and prospects are highly contingent on changing state interests and strategies, the extent and consequences of which they cannot predict or control. On the one hand, state institutions enact legislation and introduce support schemes and initiatives that aim to recruit more migrants residing in Denmark to meet the increasing demand for skilled care workers. On the other hand, educational policies and particularly the 'paradigm shift' in Danish immigration policies obstruct migrants' access to training programmes and skilled work in eldercare. Stricter immigration policies and legislation have been designed to make Denmark a less attractive destination for new refugees and to facilitate the repatriation of resident migrants and refugees (Rytter 2023). These changes are felt most acutely by Syrian trainees, who constantly face the risk of having their residence permits withdrawn, whereas Ukrainian trainees can apply for residence permits through a work contract with a Danish employer, if they terminate their training and return to work in agriculture.

The Danish welfare state's various interests shape the contingent lives of the care work trainees. In many ways, their experiences reflect an inherent paradox in state interests, between a stricter immigration policy and the demand for more skilled labour. Both state interests are rooted in a fear of a future drain on the Danish welfare state. Currently, the employment rate in Denmark is high, resulting in labour shortages in many sectors. At the same time, democratically elected governments have for the past decades in large parts favoured less immigration. Migrant care work trainees are perceived both as a threat to welfare state resources and as part of the solution to sustaining the welfare state by meeting labour demands. Danish politicians must balance these conflicting demands and interests, and individual migrants who 'go the care work way' must deal with the uncertainty and contingency that result from the 'tangled governing mechanisms of immigration and labour regimes' (Shapiro and Egaa Jørgensen 2021, 173), and the tangled governing mechanisms of integration and deportation.

This paradox became even more apparent in March 2022, when Denmark received thousands of Ukrainian refugees following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Within weeks, the Danish government issued a special act consistent with the enactment of the EU Temporary Protection Directive.[6] This act grants temporary Danish residence to Ukrainians without them having to go through an asylum-seeking process or applying

for work permits. While other refugees are subjected to increasingly stricter requirements and risk deportation to countries torn by war and conflict, Ukrainian refugees are allowed to work, go to school and freely decide where to live (Narvselius and Padovan-Özdemir 2022). While, without doubt, the EU Directive played a role in the government implementing this act, another ethos behind the act was reflected by Danish politicians and labour organisations who seemed to advocate their openness to Ukrainian migrants by referring to the acute lack of labour and 'the many good experiences with Ukrainians in the Danish labour market', as a former immigration minister stated after meeting with the social partners in March 2022 (Ritzau 2022). By May 2024, 82% of the new Ukrainian migrants had been recruited for work, primarily in agriculture, industry, and the service sector. Danish municipalities succeeded in employing several hundred Ukrainians to work in eldercare.[7]

Tensions between restrictive stances on immigration and labour market demands are observed in other welfare states and are neither rare nor new. For example, this tension is seen in Finland, where labour migration is a rather recent phenomenon (Näre 2013; Wrede and Näre 2013). Political and financial practices in the global healthcare industry, along with reforms that allow Finnish employers to hire cheaper and more flexible labour, have enabled private recruitment agencies to recruit Filipino nurses for eldercare (Näre and Silva 2021). This recruitment addresses labour shortages in eldercare but raises several issues. First, the origin of these nurses from the Global South exacerbates organisational inequalities, as registered or specialised nurses from the Philippines are recruited for practical nursing roles. The primary justification for this downgrading of their skills is their limited command of Finnish. Second, the precarious legal status of Filipino nurses makes them compliant workers, as their temporary residence permits tie them to their employers while they are still in the process of applying for permanent residence (Näre and Silva 2021). The care work trainees addressed in our study are better positioned than the Filipino nurses in Finland, because they are pursuing training in Denmark. However, as mentioned, Denmark is expected to follow Finland's example and import healthcare professionals from countries such as India and the Philippines. This raises questions about how the state's conflicting interests will affect these migrants' rights in relation to their terms of employment and residence permits.

Notes

1. We use the term 'migrant' rather than 'immigrant' to maintain an openness regarding our interlocutors' relations and sense of belonging to their countries of origin and to emphasise their experiences of temporariness due to their temporary residence status in Denmark.
2. Danish municipalities have also recruited care workers directly from other European countries, such as Spain and Germany, and in 2024, the Danish government is collaborating with various public institutions on arrangements to initiate recruitment of healthcare professionals, including trained care workers, directly from India and the Philippines (see https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/13666011/lolland-kommune-henter-social--og-sundhedsmedarbejdere-i-udlandet?publisherId=3984657, accessed 28 June 2024).
3. As argued by Liversage (2024, 162), 'a broader definition of international labour migrants can also include individuals who have migrated to achieve family reunification with a labour migrant'.
4. See https://refugees.dk/fakta/tal-og-statistik/hvor-mange-kommer-og-hvorfra/, accessed 3 October 2024.

5. From 2019 to 2021, the Danish Immigration Service re-evaluated and made decisions in 1117 cases concerning refugees from Damascus and the surrounding areas, with the result that 381 Syrian refugees and reunified family members had their residence permits withdrawn because of what was seen as improved security in the region. However, 46% of these cases were later reversed by the Danish Refugee Appeals Board (Rytter et al. 2023).
6. See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1469, accessed 22 November 2023.
7. See https://jobindsats.dk/rapportbank/monitorering-af-arbejdsmarkedet/monitorering-af-fordrevne-personer-fra-ukraine/, accessed 28 June 2024.

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