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Refugee Dispersal in Denmark: From Macro- to Micro-scale Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Immigration and asylum has become a highly politicised policy area in Western Europe, where discourses resting on refugees as a 'burden' have prompted policy measures to disperse them. This paper examines the operation of refugee dispersal in Denmark using an integrated mixed-method approach. Macro-scale patterns are examined using statistical data, revealing that, at a *national* scale, the objectives of dispersal have been achieved, and refugees have been dispersed relatively evenly between regions, but at a *regional* scale, the reality has been different. In direct contradiction to the stated aims of the policy, dispersal has primarily been housing-led, and has occurred mainly in areas of relative social deprivation. Dispersal has effectively constituted a process of socio-spatial ethnic segregation. Micro-scale processes are elucidated through the use of in-depth interviews with a small number of refugees, which reveal significant isolation and social exclusion among dispersed refugees. There is also evidence that the policy, formulated within a culturally racist discourse in the public sphere, has also contributed to this discourse through the stigmatisation of refugees, a situation exacerbated by high levels of unemployment among the ethnic minorities generally. This paper therefore warns against the social engineering inherent within the conceptualisation of dispersal which, in effect, has resulted in the spatial segregation of refugees in areas experiencing pre-existing deprivation and social exclusion, and the inherent dangers that this entails in fuelling resentment and anti-refugee hostility.

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INTRODUCTION

> 'The migrant – or, in a more recent incarnation, the asylum seeker – has been the spectre on whose fate the progress of the right has been founded. How swiftly the words "asylum-seeker" become invaded by all the negative associations once evoked by the immigrant. How quickly the attribute "bogus" attaches itself to the idea of the persecuted and marginalised.' (Seabrook, 2000)

The last two decades in Western Europe have seen the politicisation of refugee policy to the extent that the extreme right has made major inroads into national politics in a number of countries, largely on the basis of anti-immigration election manifestos. This process has resulted in the stigmatisation of refugees and

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asylum-seekers by discourses on both the political right and left, and subsequent erosion of their rights. Denmark is one among several European countries to operate a refugee dispersal policy. This paper examines the policy in an integrated way, examining both the macro-level implications of the policy and its micro-level impacts on individual refugees. It is argued that the way dispersal has been implemented has, contrary to the original aims of the policy, resulted in residential and social segregation of refugees into social housing areas already characterised by relative social deprivation, a process which has contributed to an increasingly hostile and xenophobic climate in Denmark. It is also argued that refugee dispersal in Denmark has disrupted the potentially beneficial role of pre-existing social and family networks by breaking these bonds, and that this process has generated isolation and social exclusion among refugees.

The findings of this paper are highly relevant within the wider European context, where several other countries have adopted dispersal policies. Britain's earlier attempts to disperse refugees have been problematic, as demonstrated by the 'disastrous' failure of the Vietnamese dispersal policy in 1979–81, where dispersal prevented the growth of a viable Vietnamese community which could have provided a vital support function. Instead, isolation and lack of services led to high levels of secondary migration (Robinson and Hale, 1989). The 'Sweden-wide' policy (Hammar, 1993), which is very similar to the Danish policy, has also resulted in significant secondary migration to major cities (Andersson, 1993, 1998). Germany (Black *et al.*, 1993), Norway (Hauff and Vaglum, 1993), the Netherlands (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 1997) and Finland (Liebkind, 1995) have also practised dispersal, with varying results, and more recent policy measures in Britain to disperse refugees and remove pressure on services in the South Eastern region have already created serious problems (Bright and Ahmed, 2001; Greg, 2000).

Dispersal is frequently 'justified' by the need to spread the financial 'burden' of refugee resettlement, and while it is recognised that welfare provision for refugees necessarily requires a degree of state involvement, dispersal can also have negative repercussions for refugees themselves. It is the intention in this paper to demonstrate that excessive institutionalisation of this welfare function is undesirable for all concerned. However, this material should also be considered in the context of a society which has traditionally placed a high value on social cohesion and equality, achieved through comprehensive and generous welfare provision. This has been implemented through highly bureaucratic mechanisms resulting in a high degree of institutionalisation of welfare functions in general (Vestergård, 1998). It should also be considered that recognition rates for asylum-seekers have been relatively high in Denmark and that, at an institutional level, there has been a sustained commitment to refugee welfare at home and abroad, which has been notably absent in some other European countries such as Britain.

METHODS

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the dispersal policy at two different scales. To achieve this, a mixed-method approach has been adopted. Macro-scale *patterns* are examined using statistical data,[1] specifically to evaluate the degree of dispersal which has occurred nationally and regionally. Statistical relationships are calculated to clarify the role of housing tenure in the implementation of policy. Micro-scale *processes* are examined through the use of primary data, where the impacts of policy are evaluated at the individual level using a small number of in-depth interviews with female refugees.[2] It is not the intention that this group should be regarded as a representative sample, due to its small size. Instead, the interviews are used to provide insights into personal experiences and behaviour which may have wider ramifications for refugee policy. However, the similarity of responses among the interviewees, despite their differing migration histories and cultural backgrounds, does point to some inherent problems with the policy. The use of a mixed-method approach can thus be used to evaluate policy in an integrated way at different scales, elucidating both patterns and processes.

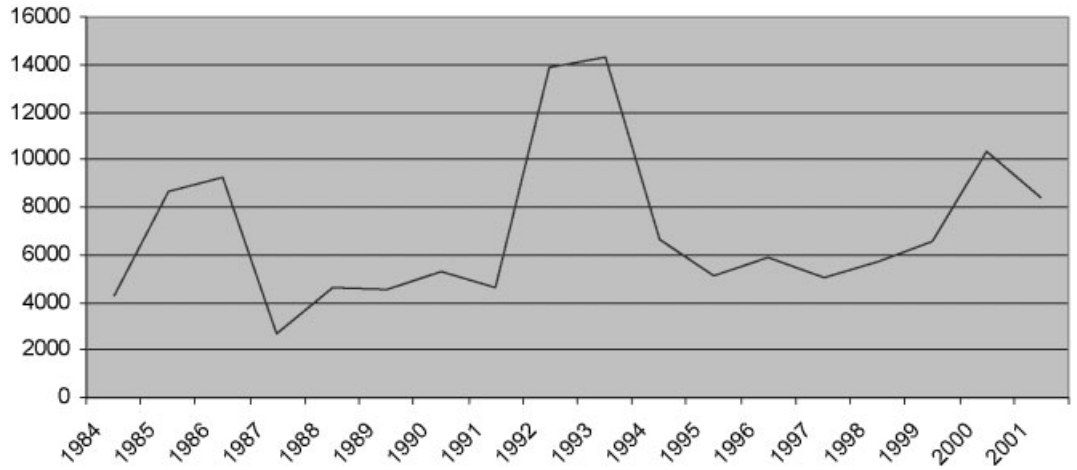

Figure 1. Numbers of asylum seekers in Denmark by year. Data from Dansk Flygtningehjælp (1996) and Danmarks Statistik databank.

ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN DENMARK

As elsewhere in Europe, the numbers of refugees arriving in Denmark increased sharply during the mid-1980s (Fig. 1), a situation which was perceived to overstretch the capacity of the existing reception system. This precipitated an anti-refugee backlash from the political right, which was instrumental in the implementation of a more restrictive policy in 1986, resulting in a significant drop in numbers (Wren, 2001). It was also during this period of restriction that the refugee dispersal policy was first conceptualised and implemented. 'Justification' for dispersal was framed within the ethos of the Danish welfare state, where concepts of decentralisation and equitable distribution of resources have been central. However, the ideology of dispersal within this context rests upon the perception of minority ethnic groups in general as a 'burden' to society, a perception which stems from a culturally racist discourse and its inherent fear of spatial concentrations. The majority of refugee groups arriving in Denmark have been from Muslim-majority countries (Table 1), and have arrived during times of high unemployment. Anti-immigration discourses have therefore developed as specifically anti-Muslim and anti-refugee, where refugees have been perceived as part of a specifically 'Muslim invasion' which has been portrayed as a threat to Danish culture (Wren, 2001) and as threaten-

Table 1. Numbers of asylum-seekers in Denmark by country of origin: 1996 and 2001.

Country	1996	Country	2001
Somalia	1420	Iraq	2100
Iraq	692	Afghanistan	2088
Stateless Palestinians	607	Bosnia-Herzegovina	1005
Fed. Rep. Yugoslavia	359	Fed. Rep. Yugoslavia	557
Bosnia-Herzegovina	309	Somalia	519
Sri Lanka	298	Iran	264
Afghanistan	239	Stateless Palestinians	198
Iran	200	Russia	122

Compiled using data from: Indenrigsministeriet (1997) and Danmarks Statistik databank.

Table 2. Asylum applications in Europe: 1994 and 2000.

Country	1994	Country	2000	Asylum applications per 1000 inhabitants (2000)
Germany	127,210	UK	97,860	1.66
Netherlands	52,576	Germany	78,760	0.96
UK	41,000	Netherlands	43,890	2.78
France	26,044	Belgium	42,690	4.20
Sweden	18,640	France	38,590	0.65
Switzerland	16,134	Austria	18,280	2.23
Belgium	14,340	Italy	18,000	0.31
Spain	10,230	Switzerland	17,660	2.39
Denmark	6651	Sweden	16,370	1.84
Austria (1993)	4356	Norway	10,320	2.31
Norway	3379	Denmark	10,080	1.90
Italy	1834	Spain	7040	0.18

Source of data: Migration News Sheet, July 1995, and UNHCR (2000).

ing the viability of the Danish welfare state due to high levels of refugee unemployment. This has occurred in spite of relatively modest asylum migration by European standards (Table 2).

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT POLICY IN DENMARK

During the period of this fieldwork in 1995, an 18-month integration programme was in operation for all new refugees, forming the basis of a system which has continued to the present day with only minor changes. The integration programme commences once refugee status has been granted, and prior to this, during the pre-asylum phase, asylum-seekers are compelled to live in special centres (such as those currently under proposal by the British government). They are frequently moved around the country with little control over their circumstances, generating anxiety and uncertainty. A significant number of asylum-seekers already have social or family contacts in Denmark, and experience difficulty in maintaining these contacts and benefiting from their potential support function at this time. In addition, they are not permitted to work during this period and have very limited access to any form of education (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 1992). This problem has been acknowledged, and some changes were implemented in 1998 to facilitate earlier access to language and other integration services (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 1998).

It is at the beginning of the integration programme (once asylum has been granted) that dispersal is officially implemented. It was the Refugee Council which was responsible for the integration programme until 1998, when municipalities gradually began to take over this function. At the start of the programme, each refugee is allocated a caseworker to oversee the arrangement of care functions in an integrated way. These include: welfare payments, language tuition, career advice, housing provision, health care, and school and nursery placements (Melchior, 1990). The programme is compulsory, and non-attendance at language classes can incur loss of welfare benefits. This period is conceptualised as a temporary phase of positive discrimination, designed to equip refugees to function in Danish society on an equal footing with the rest of the population, particularly in the labour market (Finansministeriet, 1988), and a period in which they will attend language classes rather than work.

The operation of dispersal has varied considerably over time depending on the numbers requiring resettlement, but the ethos from the inception of the policy has been to spread refugees as evenly as possible throughout the country, avoiding too many placements in the metropolitan region which has a housing shortage and a large pre-existing ethnic min-

ority population. The decision regarding each individual placement is made with consideration to the wider goals of dispersal, but also to any potential career plans or special needs of individual refugees. The Refugee Council also considers the location of any family, friends and compatriots for network formation, and refugees are allowed to request specific placement areas (Finansministeriet, 1988). However, often requests are turned down, particularly if they are for Copenhagen:

> 'When we got asylum … he said we can choose which town we want to live in. We chose Copenhagen or near Copenhagen. You need to give a reason. I said because of my brother who lives in Sweden, so it will be easier to visit each other. I chose east, so they placed me in the west. I got Esbjerg, and Esbjerg is at the other end of the country. So I said if we had chosen Esbjerg, then they would have sent us to Copenhagen.' (Maha)

This family was extremely unhappy with its placement and was subsequently moved to the metropolitan region on request. However, often such secondary requests are not granted, and a degree of assertion and independent action is required:

> '… we moved to X in North Jutland. We got asylum there, and when we got asylum, we also moved to North Jutland, to Y. We stayed there for many months and we asked to be moved to Copenhagen. They didn't grant this, so we moved to Copenhagen by ourselves and found a flat. They warned us not to do this. If we did, we would not get any more help.' (Khadija)

At the time of research, if refugees were able to find their own accommodation, they could leave their initial placements as this family did, but newly implemented rules will now require refugees to remain in initial placements for three years regardless of their own wishes (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 1998).

MACRO-SCALE PATTERNS AND THE ROLE OF HOUSING

The public discourse on dispersal has been presented as part of an inherently Scandinavian ethos of egalitarianism, where the financial costs of refugee resettlement can be shared equally among municipalities and allow refugees access to resources on an equal basis, but it has also been promoted as a means of easing the problem of housing refugees. The original goal of the policy was to disperse refugees in direct proportion to the pre-existing population distribution, at a concentration of 3.3 refugees per 10,000 inhabitants in all municipalities (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 1988). In response to public debate and scare stories about the need to avoid 'ghettos' forming in major cities, the authorities argued that refugees would find the integration process easier if they were dispersed, as they would have more contact with Danes rather than with their own ethnic groups.

By 1990, when the dispersal policy was at its height, almost all municipalities had received refugees.[3] Table 3 shows that there has been a fairly even distribution of refugees among counties with the exception of those encompassing major cities (Copenhagen, Fyn and Århus), while the proportion of refugees being resettled in Copenhagen county has been reduced quite considerably since the implementation of the dispersal policy in 1985 (Table 4). The Danish ethos of decentralisation of power and decision-making has given individual counties a degree of autonomy in how they have operated refugee resettlement, and as a result, individual counties have operated varying degrees of dispersal. This has often been related to conscious decisions to either centralise or decentralise resources within individual counties, but also often to housing availability. This has meant that *within* individual counties, the distribution of refugees has been more variable. In Fyn county, 74% of the refugee population (as defined in Table 3) is concentrated in one municipality (Odense – the county town). In Århus county a similar situation exists, with 84% of the refugee population concentrated in the county town, while in Ringkøbing county, more even dispersal has resulted in only 2% of the refugee population being accommodated in the county town (Indenrigsministeriet, 1996). Thus, while it is policy implemented at national level that has determined the *regional* dispersal of refugees throughout the country, other factors have determined their dispersal *within* regions.

Housing availability has been cited by the

Table 3. Distribution of citizens of 12 main refugee-producing countries[a] by county, 1996.

County	Total	Refugees per 10,000 inhabitants	Year integration centre established
Copenhagen and Frederiksberg[b]	9603	170	1956
Copenhagen[c]	5948	98	–
Frederiksborg	2898	82	1984
Roskilde	2198	97	1985
V. Sjælland	2543	88	1985
Storstrøm	1729	67	1985
Bornholm	49	11	–
Fyn	5927	126	1979
S. Jylland	1766	70	1985
Ribe	1928	86	1985
Vejle	3345	98	1985
Ringkøbing	2163	80	1985
Århus	10,043	161	1970
Viborg	1447	63	1985
N. Jylland	4198	86	1979

Source: Indenrigsministeriet (1996) and Finansministeriet (1988).
[a] Poland, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Chile, Ethiopia, Somalia, Romania, Stateless.
[b] Copenhagen and Frederiksberg together are officially categorised as both a county and as individual municipalities. In this table, they are classed together as a county.
[c] Excludes Copenhagen municipality and Frederiksberg.

Refugee Council as one of the major determinants of refugee dispersal within individual counties, playing a crucial role in the successful resettlement process. Placements have most often occurred in areas where housing vacancies are common, notably in areas of social deprivation, particularly in the newer social housing sector where rents are high. In 1995, 69% of new refugee placements were in the social housing sector, with a further 29% in the privately rented sector (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 1996).

Table 4. Percentage of total refugee population[a] in Denmark by county.

County	1980	1985	1990	1995
Copenhagen	48	35	18	24
Frederiksborg	4	5	5	6
Roskilde	3	1	4	5
V. Sjælland	4	2	5	5
Storstrøm	3	1	4	3
Bornholm	0.08	0.1	0.07	0.1
Fyn	7	12	12	12
S. Jylland	2	3	4	4
Ribe	5	3	3	3
Vejle	5	5	6	6
Ringkøbing	1	2	5	5
Århus	14	21	16	18
Viborg	0.2	2	3	3
N. Jylland	5	9	10	7

[a] Defined as nationals of: Poland, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Vietnam.
Source: Sydjysk Universitetcenter dataset.

Table 5. Correlations between percentage social housing and percentage refugees, 1996.

County	Correlation coefficient
Copenhagen[a]	0.56
Frederiksborg	0.769
Roskilde	0.77
Vestsjælland	0.65
Storstrøms	0.747
Bornholm[b]	–
Fyn	0.846
S. Jylland	0.691
Ribe	0.891
Vejle	0.909
Ringkøbing	0.883
Århus	0.723
Viborg	0.797
N. Jylland	0.572

[a] Includes Copenhagen municipality, Frederiksberg and Copenhagen county.
[b] Not applicable, only five municipalities and minimal social housing as predominantly rural. Calculated using data from: Indenrigsministeriet (1996) and database compiled at Sydjysk Universitetscenter, Esbjerg.
All coefficients significant at 5%.

To confirm the relationship between housing tenure and the distribution of refugees, correlations between the distribution of social housing and the distribution of the refugee population (by municipality) were calculated for each county.[4] Results show that in almost all counties, there is indeed a significant relationship (Table 5), although in Copenhagen county the relationship is weaker, since more privately rented accommodation is available. This confirms the Refugee Council's assertion that the role of housing, and in particular social housing, has been fairly crucial in shaping placement policies within counties. Thus it appears that the housing market is a more powerful constraining factor than policy directives.

DISPERSAL OR SOCIAL SEGREGATION?

At a *national* scale, it is clear that a high degree of dispersal is being achieved, particularly between counties, but at a *regional* scale (i.e. within counties) there have been varying degrees of dispersal. If the availability of social housing is the major criterion upon which refugee resettlement depends, then clearly, despite government attempts to promote even dispersal, the objectives of this dispersal policy cannot be achieved, as social housing is unevenly distributed. Furthermore, as social housing is provided for the economically disadvantaged sectors of society, refugees are being systematically resettled in areas of relative social deprivation, some of which have become heavily stigmatised. If this process is considered at a scale smaller than municipality level, the results of the policy are in effect not dispersal, but systematic segregation (and *concentration*) of refugees in socially deprived and stigmatised areas. This process has occurred independently of state intervention in many of Western Europe's inner cities, where migrant populations have tended to cluster in inner city areas characterised by poor housing and social deprivation (White, 1985). While it is outwith the scope of this paper to evaluate the effects of ethnic segregation in a wider context, it is recognised that where it is a voluntary process, ethnic clustering can be beneficial in the early stages after migration (Musterd *et al.*, 1997) and can offer protection from racism. It can also provide a critical mass for the provision of specialist services such as mosques and food shops (Van Kempen and Van Weesep, 1997) and can help in the provision of state sector services, while also encouraging ethnic entrepeneurship (Musterd and De Winter, 1998). However, segregation is also attributed to structural factors such as discrimination and poverty, and negative impacts such as neighbourhood stigmatisation have been reported in Sweden (Pred, 1997). Educational disadvantage and poor service delivery have also been identified as problematic outcomes of segregation in Sweden (Andersson, 1998) and the Netherlands (Musterd and De Winter, 1998). Segregation can also perpetuate racial inequality and disadvantage for further generations (Smith, 1989). In the Danish case, the social engineering being exercised through the refugee dispersal policy has effectively 'dispersed' this ethnic segregation to a much wider range of geographical locations throughout Denmark, often to areas with no pre-existing minority ethnic populations. The refugees are not dispersed in groups of similar background and therefore do not

benefit from localised concentrations in the same way as migrants would where voluntary concentration is based on their own ethnic networks. This has produced effects entirely at odds with the aims of the policy, since it has contributed to the ethnic concentrations it was designed to prevent. These processes have also occurred in Sweden, where a similar policy has been imposed upon a housing structure not very different from that in Denmark (Andersson, 1998). As in Sweden, dispersal has created a situation where the juxtaposition of relative poverty among the indigenous resident population, with new influxes of refugees perceived to be benefiting from positive discrimination, characterises a wide range of locations. Often, small, previously ethnically homogeneous communities are being presented with groups of refugees, perceived to be benefiting from preferential resource allocation and to be using up facilities funded through the local taxation system. It is partly through this process that refugee policy has become a national issue in Denmark, and that the dispersal policy itself has fuelled the racialisation of Denmark's refugee population. Readers' letters in a high profile media campaign in 1997 demonstrated how this process is conceptualised in the popular imagination:

> '… I think it isn't so strange that people are against the foreigners, when politicians give them special treatment. Politicians are to blame for people becoming racists. …' (*Ekstra Bladet* 9/4/97:25)

> 'Ager Baunsbak-Jensen thinks that the main priority should be to teach Danes how to live in a multi-ethnic society. The man must be raving mad or paid by the Muslims to make such a statement. What kind of a mentality is that, that the foreigners should dictate over us. We barely have enough work for Danes. …' (*Ekstra Bladet* 6/4/97:14)

Although these letters from a tabloid newspaper cannot be regarded as being entirely representative of the views of the Danish population, they do characterise one camp in a highly polarised immigration debate. Comments made by an elderly woman (during an informal discussion) whose neighbouring (social housing) flat had been let to the Refugee Council for housing refugee families, typified this attitude. When asked how she got on with her new neighbours, she complained angrily:

> '… I never see them. The woman doesn't speak Danish at all, so I can't talk to her. It's really unfair that they were given that flat, because I know of lots of Danish families who have been on the waiting list for a long time. They have more right to the flat than foreigners …' (Marie)

The modern Danish welfare state was founded on the principle of equality, with equal treatment for all citizens, so that positive discrimination arouses very negative reactions, particularly among those who themselves experience difficulty in securing adequate housing and employment.

MICRO-SCALE PROCESSES: SOCIAL AND FAMILY NETWORKS

While the above material has identified macro-scale processes of segregation resulting from the Danish dispersal policy, the policy also has important implications for individual refugees. The following section will draw upon accounts from individual refugees, identifying key issues which have arisen from their direct experiences of dispersal. This will highlight the importance of social networks in the migration and adaptation process and the implications of dispersal for future employment opportunities.

A social networks framework has primarily been associated with labour migration research (Böhning, 1972; Hjarnø, 1988; Boyd, 1989), but has more recently been considered important among refugees (Escalona and Black, 1995; Koser, 1997). Research in the Netherlands (Koser, 1997) has demonstrated how the important role of social networks in the integration/adaptation process is disrupted by dispersal. Koser observed that social networks among Iranian refugees in the Netherlands performed an important function of providing capital to pay smugglers for relatives to leave Iran, and also helped in the adaptation process after arrival. Research in Britain, Sweden and Italy has also demonstrated that social networks provide important support functions, particularly in finding work

Table 6. Reasons given for seeking asylum in Denmark.

Reasons	
Family in Denmark	3
Friend in Denmark	1
Traffickers decided destination	2
Quota refugee	1
Mistakenly left plane in wrong country	1

(Wren and Boyle, 2002). This is also evident among the interviewees in this study. Those interviewed were asked why they specifically came to Denmark (Table 6). Half of those interviewed came to Denmark as a direct result of networks with family and friends in Denmark. Nearly all of those who came as refugees subsequently attempted to help other friends and relatives in difficulty abroad to gain access to the asylum procedure in Denmark, either through official channels, or by supplying economic assistance and knowledge of immigration procedures. However, the important role of social networks has received minimal attention from policy-makers, and as a result, many new arrivals are being denied the valuable support function of the social and family networks which often originally brought them to Denmark.

The interviews highlighted some major problems of isolation and social exclusion related to the dispersal policy. When questioned about the extent of their social interaction with Danes, almost all respondents reported that this was minimal:

> 'I don't have much contact with Danes. Very rarely. It is maybe only where I live, but no more. But many Iraqis, also Arabs … some things one can't decide, it's just what comes. And with my home country, it is because we have the same customs, you know. Where we sit and talk, we have something to talk about.' (Teriska)

In response to a question about whether social contacts were mainly Arabic or Danish:

> 'Both really. I don't have very many friends. I don't know why I have so few friends. I have two Danish friends and I have an Arabic friend, only one. And then I have my family, and then the X society (Iraqi) where we meet once a month, and that is not based on friendship, it is work and things like that. Yes, nothing else.' (Nadia)

When a Palestinian woman was asked who her social contacts were, she replied:

> 'Mainly Arabs. Some Danes but not many. Only two. I am very lonely. There is only one other Muslim family in X and they are Iraqis. I need a really good friend living beside me. I would like contact with more Danes, but I don't think that Danes like immigrants. I have no contact with my Danish neighbours. … and no work, so I can't improve my Danish language, then I forget it. … Without contact with Danes I can't improve my Danish and I can't work.' (Leila)

Despite attending a Refugee Council language school regularly, this Palestinian woman is typical of many, caught in a cycle where the resources used to teach her Danish are wasted because her contacts with Danes are so minimal that she rarely has a chance to practise her language skills outside the classroom situation. Her problems were aggravated by the dispersal policy, which had resulted in her placement in a semi-rural town within the metropolitan region, where few other ethnic minority families lived. When asked which was the most important issue facing her in Denmark, she replied:

> 'Only that I don't talk to anyone. … We can't speak very good Danish, and not fast enough. My Danish isn't good enough that I can work. I would like to learn it better, but I don't have enough contact with Danes, so I don't use it. I have gone to language school for five years and learned it, but I don't use it very much, so I forget it again.' (Leila)

This problem was also highlighted by two Iraqi women who had experienced similar problems:

> '… the adults, they have more difficulty learning Danish than the children, they learn in a different way. The children learn through going to school and learning Danish and using it, but the adults, they can go on courses and learn Danish, but

> come home and don't speak to anyone. For example, we have no contact with Danes. We don't go to work and learn new words.' (Maha)

> 'I only have contact with Danes in my language school. Nowhere else.' (Khadija)

Clearly, in these cases, resources are being used inappropriately, and would be better targeted at some sort of vocational training with in-built language teaching. Other interviewees reinforced the idea that refugees are more likely to enhance their language skills if they are actively working. One who was lucky to have found unskilled service sector work reported:

> 'I can say that I have had no social contacts with Danes. Only when I work, because I have to. But when I am outside, no more. No, I don't have any.' (Teriska)

Very importantly, the lack of social contacts with Danes does not appear to be related to a voluntary wish to mix only with people of the same ethnic group:

> 'I have friends from my home country, and I also have friends from going out to work. There are also some who aren't from my home country, but they are also foreigners, we get on well. I don't know why, you understand. For example, I have a friend from Thailand. There is a difference between Iraq and Thailand … I don't know why. Maybe it is because we are both foreigners in Denmark. …' (Teriska)

Although the refugee policy ensures that basic material needs are fulfilled by the state in the form of housing, welfare benefits and access to health care and language training, there are other deeper psychological needs which, it could be argued, should exist outwith the jurisdiction of the state. The refugee policy interferes with the fulfilment of these needs by removing the ability of individual refugees to act upon their own impulses and needs, through institutionalising many of the processes that individuals normally accept as being within their own jurisdiction. The dispersal policy and integration programme effectively remove from the individual important decision-making processes such as deciding where to live, forming social and ethnic networks, and choosing educational institutions for their children. These are aspects of life which most Danish citizens would take for granted, and no other social groups in Danish society are subjected to such a high degree of state control. Such a policy does not address the need for people to initiate their own friendships, friendship being a highly personal issue which cannot be controlled by an official agency, as this account by an Iraqi woman reveals:

> '… we were moved in with another family from Iraq, but they were different … They were a bit too religious, they wore headscarves, and I was the opposite. They had also begun to pray, and wanted to influence me. So I said each of us should keep our opinions to ourselves and respect one another, then we won't have a problem. We should keep ourselves to ourselves and not interfere with each other, then we will not have a problem with how we look, how we dress, or what we eat, so we can cooperate well and live without a problem. The husband agreed. The woman, she had a sister who has lived in Denmark for seven years. She didn't like what I said, I can see it on her face. … I didn't care because she didn't live with me … We had fun with breakfast, I invited them to taste my food, and they invited us to taste their food, we were happy. But her, her sister, she wanted to know everything, and if she came to visit them, she asked me why I didn't wear a headscarf. And then she wanted to take me to visit other families, refugee families I could have contact with. So I said, "You know what? I can't be bothered with families like that who will look at theirs and mine and what I wear. I want people to accept me as I am. …'" (Maha)

This woman was also reluctant to initiate friendships with people when she knew she may soon be moved on by the Refugee Council:

> '… and I don't want to get to know the people you know and then we maybe have to move from this town. Why should I get to

know people when it will make me upset when we lose them and I can't see them any more?' (Maha)

The integration programme and dispersal policy effectively deny refugees one of the fundamental resources required for integration, the formation of supportive social networks which they themselves initiate. These are replaced by institutionalised functions, coordinated by the Refugee Council and official agencies. This denies refugees the use of some of their most powerful resources, to draw upon their own skills and to help others to do so. This finding is corroborated by other comparative research of Vietnamese communities in three countries, including Denmark, where the Vietnamese population under investigation experienced greater difficulty in establishing their own ethnic community organisations in Denmark due to dispersal. Where these organisations existed, they were imposed from above by the Danish authorities and met with limited success (Dorais, 1998). In a more general sense, Watters (2001) described measures to disperse refugees as fundamentally disempowering, having a negative impact on their ability to deal with mental health problems which may have arisen before, during and after flight. He argued that refugees often prefer to draw on the resources of their own communities rather than use official agencies to overcome these problems. The sentiments of many refugees in response to the Danish integration programme are well summarised by a refugee author:

'Welfare payments have a positive side, but work against the integration principle. Resources and talents are isolated at home in front of the television and video, far away from the dialogue and contact with society. Welfare means boredom and nostalgia, which can lead to strong nationalism. Welfare also means that refugees must endure many problems. Other people find housing for them in a quarter which others have chosen. Welfare recipients must wait until the system finds something for them to do. A job which he doesn't want at all. An institution for the children which he hasn't chosen …' (Esfahani, 1997)

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Although dispersal appeared to be a major contributory factor to the isolation experienced by some refugees, the situation was often exacerbated by long-term unemployment. Very few refugees are in employment at the end of the 18-month integration programme, and unemployment often extends for a much longer period. This can be attributed to three major factors: a particular set of unfavourable circumstances within the Danish labour market; labour-market discrimination; and a general reluctance to recognise qualifications from abroad. As a result, many refugees have to undergo extensive retraining within their own professions to enable them to work.

Conditions in the Danish labour market were particularly unfavourable for refugees during the period of this study, as unemployment was high even by European standards, and competition therefore intense (Table 7). Hjarnø (1991) and Schierup (1993) have established that the majority of those from minority ethnic groups in Denmark are not regarded as serious competition in the labour market, as they are largely excluded, with Denmark having among the highest rates of ethnic minority unemployment in Western Europe. Hjarnø attributed this partially to structural changes in the labour market common to all Western European countries, which have created a demand for higher levels of skills, particularly communication and organisational skills. However, he also cites well-documented and widespread discrimination by employers. In the absence, until 1994, of specific anti-discrimination legislation (such as the Race Relations Act in Britain), little has been done to combat or even to acknowledge the extent of discrimination. Lack of language skills is commonly cited by employers as a major barrier to ethnic minority employment, but its importance is refuted by evidence among second-generation immigrants with high Danish educational qualifications, which shows that they are also being excluded from the labour market (Just Jeppesen, 1989). Ottosen (1992) cited the failure of many second-generation immigrants to acquire practical placements as part of their vocational training (resulting in inability to complete courses) as a

Table 7. Percentage of working-age adults by occupational sector and nationality, 1993.

Origin	Self-employed	White collar	Manual	Unemployed	Non-working spouses	Other unspecified
Turkey	6.3	4.4	33.5	48.9	6.2	0.7
Pakistan	16.4	5.0	25.5	44.8	5.0	3.3
Yugoslavia	2.3	9.1	45.7	32.0	2.4	8.5
Poland	6.7	13.7	28.5	32.9	6.7	11.5
Africa	4.8	11.1	27.8	43.3	4.6	8.4
Asia (excl. Pakistan)	7.5	10.6	33.0	33.0	7.5	8.4
Denmark	9.3	44.6	27.0	9.8	9.3	0.0

Source: Calculated using data from Danmarks Statistik (1994).

major barrier to employment. Her qualitative research revealed a particular reluctance among employers in the service sector to take on ethnic minorities for practical placements for fear of upsetting co-workers and clients. Her findings were corroborated by qualitative work undertaken by Hjarnø (1991) with young refugees in Esbjerg, and a later study by Hjarnø and Jensen (1997) which identified severe discrimination against Pakistani and Turkish job applicants.

As elsewhere in Europe, a large proportion of refugees entering Denmark are highly educated professionals, and therefore have high expectations of their employment prospects after migration. However, one of the few major studies of refugees in Denmark (Melchior, 1990) revealed high levels of unemployment among three refugee groups studied: Vietnamese (33%), Poles (42%) and Iranians (32%). Ottosen (1992), in a separate study, found that the most highly qualified refugees were in most difficulty, as their professional qualifications are either not recognised or undervalued. This is corroborated by research findings in Sweden, where non-recognition of qualifications has been a major problem for skilled refugees (Wren and Boyle, 2002). One outcome of this situation is that the most capable among the ethnic minorities are confined to specialist occupational niches, closely related to their own ethnic communities. Many find work as interpreters, trans-cultural teachers, psychologists, and ethnic minority counsellors, and although there is a growing demand for these services, this sector is limited in terms of the numbers of people it can employ. The difficulties involved in recognition of professional qualifications surprised and dismayed some interviewees, who had hoped to use their skills and expertise after migration. They arrived with high expectations and were extremely disappointed to find themselves welfare recipients after several years of residence in Denmark:

> 'Not all immigrants are hungry and come to Denmark. For example, if we look at my family (in Iraq), we are well off economically. My family earn their own money, for example, we have a house, we have a car. All my brothers have work, and my mother, she is a teacher. My father is a lawyer. I was qualified for a good job over there, and I can earn a lot of money, and I have also worked in Czechoslovakia as a teacher to earn money to travel here. I didn't expect to come to Denmark and get welfare benefits, because in Czechoslovakia I earned money because I worked as a teacher in an Arabic school only for immigrant children. … When I came to Denmark I thought I would get a job … I am qualified and I can earn my own money.' (Maha)

> 'If you have a qualification, a degree qualification and go to an organisation, then they don't say that your degree is the same as ours. It is always their degree which is better than the others.' (Maha)

Although it is common for refugees to accept a degree of downward social mobility after flight to a new country (Al-Rasheed, 1992), the situation seems particularly severe in Denmark. The majority of the refugees in the study had been mobile for many years prior to

seeking asylum in Denmark. Maha had successfully found work suited to her qualifications in a range of countries (Yemen, Hungary, Romania, Syria, Czechoslovakia) without any major difficulty, and could not understand why she could not work in Denmark. Another respondent had had similar experiences of working abroad:

> 'I left Iraq in 1978, I travelled to Russia to get a degree. I lived in Russia for 6 years, I have lived in Bulgaria also. I travelled to Syria, I got a job in Syria, and then travelled … from Syria to Iran, from Iran to north Iraq, Kurdistan. I stayed in Kurdistan and got married in Kurdistan … but it was very difficult and we had to flee. We fled through Iran, to Syria, and from Syria to Bulgaria. I stayed in Bulgaria for a year and then back to Syria. I worked there for a while, but not as an engineer. I worked for a newspaper. And finally we couldn't manage any more in Syria, so we came to Denmark.' (Khadija)

The norm for most refugees is to spend as many as 8–10 years in various forms of language training and vocational courses. Very few actually find secure and skilled employment, and the author perceived a general feeling of hopelessness among the respondents concerning their future employment prospects:

> 'I have experienced that, for example, I want to have a job, and everyone says that it is impossible. And I think also it is impossible because I am a foreigner …' (Khadija)

All of the interviewees expressed aspirations to work, mostly as professionals. One newly-arrived refugee wanted to continue her career as a psychologist, but would have to undergo extensive retraining. She had already recognised that her best option would be to seek employment in the 'ethnic minority sector':

> 'I really want to work in Denmark. I have worked as a psychologist for many years, helping people with problems. I can help people in Denmark. I want to help the refugees and immigrants. I will need to study a language course and then take the psychologist qualification in Denmark.' (Almaz)

Receipt of welfare benefits on a long-term basis can be very difficult to accept for people from countries where welfare provision does not exist and runs contrary to their own beliefs regarding the role of individuals within society. Further, the issue of state dependency has become one of the major contributory factors to anti-refugee hostility, with refugees being stereotyped as 'scroungers' and *de facto* economic migrants, a view typified by the following reader's letter in a tabloid newspaper:

> 'a large majority don't find it acceptable that the country is overrun with foreign cultures who will not or cannot adapt, and are clearly quite satisfied living well on Danish welfare. That surely cannot be called racism. It is, if anything, amazement over the positive discrimination they have received. …' (*Ekstra Bladet*, 9/4/97:24)

When asked which was the single most important issue in their lives, interviewees gave the following typical responses:

> 'Mostly work. If one has work, then one can protect oneself, one can feel that one is useful, that one earns one's own money. One isn't dependent on the social system, that Danes don't see that we are just here to get money. We work, we pay tax, we get money for working. But it is difficult to get work. In Iraq, I was an engineer. I want to work as an engineer in Denmark, but I am waiting to see if my engineering qualification will be recognised.' (Khadija)

> 'If I find a job, I will be all right. Really. Just now I am thinking how to cross the language barrier. And if I find a job, I will be very very happy. I was a social worker in Iraq, but I will take anything, anything really. That's my hope …' (Aljadri)

The above accounts typify the experiences of highly skilled refugees, who often face the prospect of many years of retraining before they are able to enter a discriminatory labour market where they are not regarded as serious contenders. Due to this set of circumstances, a negative cycle of welfare dependency, negative stereotyping, discrimination and social exclusion (Fig. 2) has evolved. This, in combi-

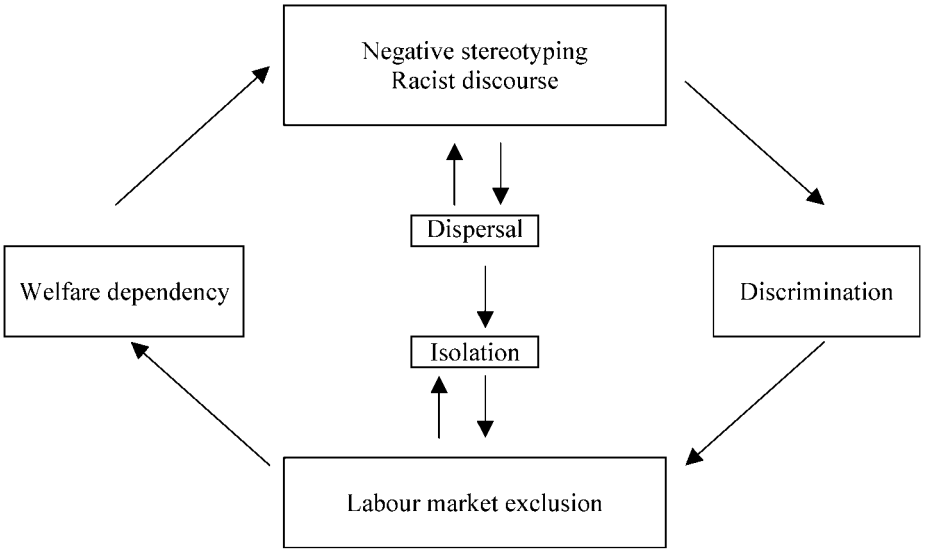

Figure 2. The cycle of discrimination and exclusion.

nation with the effects of dispersal, has created a very difficult set of circumstances for many refugees who are trying to re-establish their careers after migration.

CONCLUSION

At an institutional level, Denmark's refugee policy constitutes a genuine humanitarian attempt to honour its international responsibilities. The high recognition rates and generous welfare provision, along with the positive discrimination within the integration programme, comprise a well-meant attempt to facilitate full participation in Danish society. Ethnic minorities have also been entitled to a degree of political participation, and have had relatively easy access to Danish citizenship. However, this humanitarian stance is not reflected within the public sphere, where there is open hostility towards refugees (Wren, 2001). It is essentially a culturally racist discourse within the public sphere which has shaped Denmark's refugee dispersal policy, where dispersal is seen not only as a way to solve resource allocation problems, but also as a method of 'diluting' the refugee presence. Government policy is now moving in the direction of public opinion, and the election of a new right-wing coalition government, primarily on a post-September 11th, anti-Muslim, anti-immigration manifesto, has resulted in the implementation this year of a new hard-line immigration and asylum policy which has attracted international criticism and raised concern within the EU and from the UNHCR (Osborn, 2002). The outcomes of this policy are, as yet, unclear, although it is likely that in future there will be fewer asylum-seekers accepted into Denmark.

The integration and dispersal policy examined in this paper have inherent problems. The highly institutionalised way in which they have functioned is not only wasteful, but has taken away the impetus for individual refugees to help themselves:

> '… Here we can't decide things totally for ourselves because we get welfare benefits and we feel that there is always someone there deciding things for us, for example, we can't travel. If you want to have an education you must have a loan from the state, if you want to do something else I have to be careful, and then another example, I want to work, I can't. It is not in my hands. I think that even though there is democracy, one can't be responsible for one's own life here.' (Khadija)

The Refugee Council has done much in terms of assisting with basic human needs like

housing, often under very difficult circumstances. However, this has been at the expense of deeper psychological needs, particularly the need to make decisions concerning one's own life, to find and engage in social and ethnic networks with others of a similar background, to be actively employed and positively contribute to the society in which one lives, and to be respected by others in society. The element of dispersal involved in resettlement removes the potentially positive adaptive function of social and family networks and the support of the wider ethnic minority communities. This function has effectively been institutionalised and replaced by the official 18-month integration programme, which has largely failed to achieve its goals. The result has been a high degree of isolation and social exclusion among individual refugees, a problem compounded by adverse conditions in the Danish labour market, which have effectively rendered a large proportion of Denmark's ethnic minority population quasi-permanent welfare clients. This has resulted in a cycle of exclusion and discrimination which is extremely difficult to break, particularly in the context of the generally xenophobic climate which has prevailed throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.

Although the refugee dispersal policy is partly the outcome of a culturally racist discourse which evolved in Denmark during the 1980s, dispersal as a policy may also have *contributed* to this xenophobic discourse. The inherent contradiction in the way Danish refugee policy operates has meant that the goals of the policy have not actually been achieved, and that it may have been counterproductive. As housing availability within the social housing sector has largely determined resettlement patterns, and social housing is very unevenly distributed, if the issue is considered at a local scale, refugees are not being *dispersed* at all but systematically *segregated* in areas characterised by relative social deprivation. The dispersal policy was formulated partly to prevent segregation, but appears to be blind to pre-existing social segregation and class divisions within Danish society. This process has resulted in a potentially problematic population mix in many areas, of refugees (perceived to benefit from positive discrimination) and Danes experiencing social exclusion. Although this factor alone is not responsible for the levels of anti-refugee hostility being experienced in Denmark, there is strong reason to believe that it has exacerbated this feeling. The policy has dispersed the phenomenon to a wide range of geographical locations, thus placing the refugee issue in the forefront of public debate in a very negative manner. This in turn has led to concern over 'concentrations' of refugees and ethnic minorities generally in urban areas (Rasmussen and Børresen, 1993), leading to calls for discriminatory housing quotas for ethnic minorities in some areas (Wren, 1997).

There is good reason to believe that the conflict over resource allocation in areas of social deprivation is a factor which can contribute to xenophobia and anti-refugee hostility, particularly where it is dispersed to locations with little prior experience of ethnic minorities. Significantly, Germany is the European country that operates the most rigid refugee dispersal policy and has also experienced the greatest degree of overt neo-fascist violence towards refugees in hostels. Sweden and Norway, which also operate dispersal policies, have witnessed growth in hostility and violence towards refugees, and Björgo (1995) noted that in Sweden, 75% of such events have been recorded in smaller towns and communities where refugees are housed in groups, and not in the cities where most refugees live. Although overt physical violence towards refugees in Denmark has been fairly limited in extent, anti-refugee discourses have developed in a similar way in other European countries that operate dispersal policies. This type of conflict over resources has also been evident in Sjöbo in Sweden, where lack of accountability to the specific needs of rural peripheral communities resulted in the refusal by Sjöbo municipality to accept refugees under the official dispersal policy, and in an anti-refugee backlash more closely related to resistance to centralised bureaucratic government policy than to racism (Pred, 1997). Similarly, Sighthill in Glasgow, one of the most deprived estates in Scotland, has been used as an area for refugee resettlement under the recently implemented dispersal policy. There, a sense of abandonment by central

government among local residents, and a perceived lack of understanding of the area's specific problems, has generated some violence and resentment among a minority of Sighthill's residents (culminating in the murder of an asylum-seeker), which although not specifically racial in its origins, has found voice within a xenophobic discourse.

These issues are not easy to disentangle and deal with effectively, particularly where there are severe constraints on housing availability, but it does seem that there is scope for more appropriate solutions to be sought within the Danish context. Clearly, accommodating significant numbers of asylum-seekers in areas already experiencing social deprivation and with little prior experience of ethnic minorities is a high-risk strategy and should be avoided, unless pro-active anti-racist measures are also implemented at the time of resettlement. There are also issues of rights to be considered. The idea that some groups within a society should have restrictions placed on their choice of residential location, while the majority can choose freely, is contentious and discriminatory. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) claims that strict dispersal policies constitute a violation of the right to freedom of movement enshrined in the Geneva Convention (ECRE, 1999), yet they are routinely implemented in a number of countries.

One model which has worked successfully in Scotland (prior to the current dispersal policy), albeit on a small scale, was the resettlement of Bosnian refugees in 'viable clusters' in urban areas (McFarland, 1994:18). This model allowed viable networks to function, and also employed economies of scale for service provision. At a national level (in Denmark), a more flexible refugee resettlement model could be developed which would be more responsive to the needs of individual refugees. Effectively a system could operate at two levels, one where refugees find their own housing through their own networks, and derive benefit from these networks in the early stages of resettlement if they wish, alongside a system of voluntary clustered resettlement of ethnically homogeneous groups in socially mixed areas, which would avoid infringing the rights of individual refugees. An essential pre-requisite of any clustered resettlement would be the implementation of anti-racist campaigns in new cluster areas prior to the arrival of refugees.

Further policy measures could be implemented in relation to the problems with language training in the integration programme. Given such problems highlighted by the refugees in this paper, it could be potentially beneficial to integrate language courses with employment and retraining. The ECRE (1999) has established that employment is a key factor in the integration process, and that lack of access to employment during the early phases of resettlement can hinder long-term integration. Other evidence points to the beneficial aspects of rapid access to employment for refugees suffering from mental stress (Wren and Boyle, 2002). The integration system in Denmark does not allow refugees access to the labour market until the integration programme is complete, and this may be contributing to problems of isolation and social exclusion. If refugees were more active in the labour market in the early stages of resettlement, this could be avoided. It may also help to break the cycle of discrimination and exclusion (Fig. 2) if more refugees were seen to be actively participating in the labour market at an earlier stage in their resettlement. Extensive programmes have been introduced in the past to allow unemployed Danes temporary access to the labour market, to replace workers on temporary breaks (*Orlov*) (Debove, 1995). This highly successful system could also be extended to include refugees.

It is hoped that consideration of the situation in Denmark can provide some insights into potential problems which can arise as a result of refugee dispersal, particularly in light of the xenophobic climate sanctioned through the election of an anti-immigration, right-wing coalition government in November 2001, which now seeks to curb the rights of all ethnic minorities in Denmark. New legislation will restrict the rights of asylum-seekers and their dependants to seek refuge in Denmark, and make it more difficult to obtain Danish citizenship. It will also curtail mother-tongue teaching in schools and restrict family reunification and marriage rights (Osborne, 2002). It is as yet unclear what the effects of the policy

change will be on refugee dispersal, although it is likely that the numbers of refugees accepted will drop considerably, thus reducing the need for dispersal.

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NOTES

(1) As there are no statistics recording the number of refugees in the country at any given time, or the residential locations of those classified as refugees, it is impossible to determine exactly how many refugees are currently living in Denmark (Justitsministeriet, 1991). However, both the Refugee Council and Statistics Denmark provide statistics, by nationality, of the numbers granted asylum each year, and these data have been used in conjunction with data from the Ministry of the Interior, which record the number of foreign nationals by municipality. In these data, nationals from the 12 major refugee-producing countries (Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Somalia, Poland, Afghanistan, Romania, Chile, Ethiopia, and a 'stateless' category – largely Palestinians) are recorded by municipality. It is recognised that as the data are by nationality only, they do not adequately reflect the real patterns of residence of these national groups and that they do not always distinguish between migrants who arrived as asylum-seekers, reunified family members, and children of refugees born in Denmark. Refugees who acquire Danish citizenship effectively disappear from the data. In addition, there is a major problem related to the 12 national categories adopted, as the data do not include refugees from other countries with small refugee flows to Denmark, and some ethnic/national groups such as the Turks, Yugoslavs and Sri Lankans have arrived in Denmark as both refugees and labour migrants. This problem is highlighted by the civil war in former Yugoslavia and the subsequent refugee flows, which have necessitated some form of distinction in category between the earlier labour migrant group and this new wave of refugees from the same area. In the absence of better quality data, these statistics have to be used with a degree of caution.

(2) The interviews referred to were conducted in 1995, and constituted part of the fieldwork for a PhD thesis. Using snowball sampling methods from initial contacts, eight female refugees from a range of countries (Iraq 5, stateless Palestinian 1, Yemen 1, Chile 1) were interviewed. This group broadly reflects the origins of female refugees in Denmark, who are predominantly well educated and Muslim. The aim of the interviews was to draw out a wide range of issues related to their experiences after migration, including their experiences of the dispersal policy. The interviews were in-depth, lasting for one to two hours, and were carried out using a loosely structured set of questions, allowing flexibility, and the opportunity for the women to raise relevant issues which may not have been directly referred to in the questions. The interviews were conducted in either English or Danish, and where possible, taped. All identities and place names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

(3) The term municipality refers to small administrative units. Each county may have 20–30 municipalities. Administration occurs both at county and at municipality level, with individual county policy often determining the degree of autonomy municipalities may have regarding refugee policy.

(4) Calculations were made correlating the percentage of social housing with the percentage refugee population by municipality in each county. Each county has around 20–30 municipalities.

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