‘A gate to hell’ – Homeless Inuit Migrating from Greenland to Denmark

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Abstract_ *Consequences of some socially vulnerable Greenlanders’ journey from Greenland to Denmark are the focal point of this article. The analysis is based on years of empirical fieldwork and expert interviews, combined with theories of structural violence and welfare migration. This is presented for the first time in an international context. The situation of homeless Greenlanders in Denmark is an example of the pervasive structural problems that indigenous people are exposed to, with unequal access to a society where they are citizens due to the unity of the realm of Denmark. Greenlanders are overrepresented in the Danish homeless count. Proportionally, there should only be 17 homeless Greenlanders in Denmark, but the number is over 25 times higher. The situation is like the conditions of Inuit in Canadian cities such as Toronto and Montreal. The article examines the complex dynamics of welfare migration within the unity of the realm (consisting of Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland) and points out that Denmark is unprepared to implement the rights that Greenlandic/indigenous citizens have in Denmark. The article contributes to the understanding of the reasons for welfare migration and challenges. Denmark is not administratively structured to handle free movement and indigenous rights within the same state. As a result, some Greenlanders experience a worsening of social problems upon arrival in Denmark.*

Keywords_ *Homelessness, welfare migration, Denmark, Greenland, Indigenous*

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Introduction

Every time a homeless count is published in Denmark, citizens from Greenland, which is 3500 km away, are included. Greenlandic citizens are significantly over-represented in Danish homelessness statistics. This shows that a significant number of Greenlandic citizens living in Denmark exhibit signs of social exclusion in the form of, amongst other things, homelessness. In this article, we uncover this situation through empirical data from a prolonged ethnographic fieldwork conducted among socially vulnerable Greenlandic citizens in both Greenland and Denmark. The focus was on people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. The empirical excerpts in this article are drawn from this material and represent individual experiences that illustrate broader, recurring structural patterns, along with an analysis of the social conditions in Greenland. One negative outcome is that Greenlanders are appear in the Danish homeless census.

Context

There are close to 17 500 citizens with a Greenlandic background living in Denmark (Statistics Greenland, 2026). The majority thrives. A significant number are not employed according to the latest Danish homeless count from 2024. Approximately 400 individuals with a Greenlandic background living in Denmark were counted (Benjaminsen, 2024, p. 96). Greenland is part of the unity of the realm between Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland. This means that citizens of the Faroe Islands, and Greenland are Danish citizens. They can therefore freely settle in one of the three countries without prior application or permission. Each country has full autonomy when it comes to welfare, social policy, health, social legislation and housing legislation. In Greenland, visible homelessness has been a rising social problem over the last 10-15 years (Arnfjord, 2025). When welfare services, housing- and health policies are perceived as inadequate, some Greenlanders choose to migrate within the unity of the realm to Denmark. This is welfare migration and a minority end up in worse situation than the one they came from (Schiermacher, 2020a). Greenlanders are an indigenous people and are protected by the ILO Convention (*ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 (No.169): A Manual*, 2003). This concerns their right to speak their own language and live their own culture. It also implies that the Danish government must commit to a coordinated and systematic effort to protect the rights of Greenlanders as an indigenous people. This is, among other things, the issue that affects how Greenlanders encounter a Danish welfare system, which is designed to operate on Western values. The reality suggests that rather than securing their rights as citizens and indigenous peoples, there are barriers to their access to the welfare system in Denmark (Schiermacher, 2020a; Schiermacher & Arnfjord, 2021).

Some barriers are simple and practical, such as not having an interpreter and the lack of translation of public Danish texts into Greenlandic. This is needed to be able to understand and access their personal case files in the Danish system. Greenlandic citizens in Denmark are not accommodated in relation to the content of the ILO Convention No. 169, regarding conditions such as language, cultural understanding, or understanding of the Danish social system. Contrary to the purpose of the Convention, they must instead manage as Danes on Danish terms. Most recently, this has created a major debate and conflict at state level between Greenland and Denmark after media coverage brought forth the fact that Greenlandic children are greatly overrepresented in forced removals, and that this is done based on a non-adapted test, specifically a culturally Danish parental competence test, which does not consider Greenlandic language or culture (Bettiza & Morris, 2025; Bryant, 2025; Hivert, 2025). There are several cases of homeless Greenlandic citizens being sanctioned where claims and case files have not been made available in Greenlandic, leaving the citizen unable to fully understand the content (Abrahamsen, 2024; Mamo, 2025; Schiermacher, 2020b). In these contexts, the ILO Convention No. 169 is not working in practice.

Structural violence and welfare migration

The concepts of structural violence and welfare migration are applied in the analysis of the empirical data. Structural violence refers to systematic and indirect forms of violence that occur in social, political, and economic structures (Galtung, 1969). The concept can be used to analyse situations such as inequality, discrimination, and marginalization that worsen living conditions. The idea that the unity of the realm ensures equality obscures knowledge of systemic discrimination, since everyone should, in principle, be equal, leading to a blind spot regarding actual conditions for those who are marginalized. The lack of knowledge leads to a lack of action and a state of non-decision-making (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962), which is based on an uninformed basis and contributes to maintaining the status quo.

Welfare migration is the other concept. Migration relates to movement over long distances caused by war or conflict. Immigration usually relates to refugees moving across state borders. Welfare immigration has been a concern within the EU, especially among Western European welfare states, with right-wing politicians fearing a breakdown of the national welfare systems by Eastern Europeans (Borjas & Trejo, 1991). The concept of welfare migrations in this context relates to movement within the state due to better welfare services, housing (Doherty, 2012), and better benefits. This is similar to the effect of urbanization within nation-states. Previous studies vary when it comes to looking at welfare as a pull factor for migration. Giulette pointed 2010s to different indications in welfare spending, which was a

factor in migration numbers between states in Europe (Giulette & Wahba, 2012). This has also been explained as a reason for the movement between Greenland and Denmark (Lindqvist, 2017). Unemployment benefits in Denmark are €550-650 above the Greenlandic mark. A man we encountered during fieldwork recounts how he experiences the difference in financial help in Greenland and Denmark*: "We are in unity with Denmark and the Faroe Islands, but the social benefits that are paid out here in Greenland are so small, very small, only 600 kroner* (€80) *every fortnight*[1]*. In Denmark, it is so much, much more."*

The same goes for the social service level aimed to prohibit homelessness which is higher in Denmark. This is due to the fact that homelessness and housing first initiatives are mentioned in several legal paragraphs in the Danish social service legislation (Bekendtgørelse af lov om social service, 2025).

Better access to housing, health care, and therapeutic help in Denmark is also a pull factor. A woman with four children, whom the first author meet at a shelter in Greenland, told us with grief that she couldn't find a way to access social support in Greenland *"Even though I would like to have my own home, I have no hope. No one can help. If I had my own home, my children could grow up safely."*

There is an existing narrative that there are better opportunities in Denmark. But paradoxically, empirical evidence indicates that it requires many resources to be able to access the desired goals because of the structural violence against Greenlandic citizens seeking to access the Danish welfare state (Schiermacher, 2025). This means that the expectations that welfare migration will result in better welfare are not met. Instead, a group of Greenlandic citizens might do worse by migrating. Even though it is migration within the same state, there are several conditions that do not live up to the ideal of equal rights within the unity of the realm.

Methodology

The empirical materials are based on fieldwork conducted from Autumn 2019 to spring 2020 in both Greenland and Denmark, as well as follow-up fieldwork in Denmark from spring 2024 to autumn 2024. The collection of empirical data is based on anthropological approaches. One approach has been to understand the lived world from the inside, through time, space, and social relations (Hastrup, 2019). The anthropological fieldwork constitutes the overall methodological framework for collecting empirical data used in the analysis, including the use of techniques such as participant observation, observation, interviews, and informal conversations, depending on what was most appropriate in the given situation.

[1] The amount is from 2023

There are informants among municipal professionals, other civil servants, NGO workers, and user organizations, but most of the empirical data was collected among Greenlandic homeless citizens. The informants are selected based on a practical principle that those who participate are those who have had the opportunity and desire to talk. The informants from the homeless community are defined as belonging to the community since we have met them either at a low-threshold shelter, at a shelter, or directly on the street. Conversations and interviews have been conducted in Danish. However, knowledge of Greenlandic ways of expression, the importance of body language, and syntax in relation to having to express oneself in Danish as their second language have been incorporated. Several of the informants were followed over longer periods with repeated conversations. In this way the development of the informant's situation was tracked.

It requires sensitivity and time to establish relations and build trust with informants in a vulnerable time of their lives. A lot of time was spent on socializing and conversing with informants in their known environment, rather than in set interview situations. For the same reason, many of the conversations took place outdoors, where subjects spoke more freely and felt more comfortable than when they were indoors, for example, in a community centre or a shelter. A thorough understanding of the informants' living situations is crucial to reach the "layers" of their living conditions.

The methodological basis for illuminating this field of study of encounters between Greenlandic citizens and the system is linked to institutional ethnography developed by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith in the 1980s and 1990s. Smith's focused on studying social institutions through participant observation and analysis, and through this, she uncovered hidden or implicit processes that govern the functions of the institutions and how these processes affect the people involved in them. The essence of institutional ethnography is to investigate how social institutions, in this case, municipal institutions and legal processes, function and affect the living conditions of Greenlandic citizens in practice. It differs from traditional ethnography by focusing on institutional structures and how these structures organize and shape everyday life for people. In her book "*Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People,"* (2005), Smith highlights how the method can be used to illuminate how we are affected by interactions, rules, norms, and hierarchies. The method focuses on uncovering the hidden or implicit processes and how these processes affect the people involved in them. We thereby use the method to analyse situations in which legislation and municipal processes appear to work but leave the person at the other end in a different situation than intended. In other words, situations where Greenlandic citizens cannot access their rights and are systemically discriminated against.

The approach to the field is characterized by advocacy, which is an integral part of the action research methodology (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Feldman, 2025). It is the intention of the researchers to use the findings to actively support and advance the perspectives and rights of the informants, so they achieve meaningful and sustainable change.

Migration to Denmark is about welfare, health, and the search for new communities

Migration within the same state but between very different geographies and cultures has been addressed previously when Inuit in Canada experience similar inadequacies in the welfare and health services available in northern Canada and the regions of Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut (Christensen, 2012; Christensen et al., 2024; Gabriel, 2023; E. Peters & Andersen, 2013; E. J. Peters & Robillard, 2009). In this way, it is consistent with previous historical research on homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2023), where there was a perception that the homeless in some areas were "just" migrant workers (Harper, 1982) or vagrants (Anderson, 1923; Schneider, 1984). What we uncover here is the migration of indigenous peoples who are at high risk of ending up in homelessness, because they are not easily integrated into the country to which they migrate. In this context, it is important to mention that Greenlanders who are Danish citizens are not offered integration assistance like other migration groups and are considered Danish despite being of Greenlandic origin in terms of culture and language.

The cause of the migration

Greenland's first nationwide homeless count showed that around 1% of the population was homeless (Arnfjord & Perry, 2022). The figure is 6-8 times higher than in Denmark (Arnfjord, 2025). Although there has been active research on homelessness and lobbying to improve basic rights in Greenland for over 10 years (Arnfjord, 2023; Hansen & Andersen, 2013), there is still little political action in the area. In 2023, Greenland received a homeless strategy, with a focus on Housing First and official definitions of homelessness (Departementet for & Sociale Anliggender, Arbejdsmarked og Indenrigsanliggender, 2023). Currently, a person who is homeless has no legal rights. No legislation exists on how to operate a shelter, and which services should be made available when a person in a homeless situation seeks help i.e., in the form of preventive measure or housing-first policies.

Over a 20-year period, an average of between 1 200 and 1 300 citizens born in Greenland have emigrated to Denmark each year. (Statistics Greenland, 2024). This is approximately 2.3% of the total population. It is not possible to say for sure how many moves due to welfare reasons, as it is not registered. However, our data from the fieldwork indicates that it is financially difficult to be unemployed in Greenland, particularly due to long case processing times within the social and health administration and limited access to specialized welfare and health services. A man from the homeless community in Greenland talked about his experience of waiting for his case to be processed and the difficulty of surviving financially.

"The upper part of the spine and the lower part of the spine are so worn out; they can't do anything. I wasn't allowed to work anymore; I was going to get early retirement. But I waited. Only after three or four years—that's a very long wait just to get some social security, just to be able to survive. It was hard."

Another man, talked about being refused access to alcohol treatment in Greenland:

"*I have sought help, but was asked: 'Do you have any children?' 'No.' So, I was ignored. I wanted stop drinking then, but I can't get help to do any of that."*

This is a testimony to the significant differences between investments in welfare systems and welfare benefits between Greenland and Denmark. The economic benefits for a person on early retirement in Denmark in 2026 in roughly 2 950€ monthly; n Greenland, t's1 545€ (Takstblad – Sociale Takster 2026, 2026; Vejledning Om Regulering Pr. 1. Januar 2026 Af Satser På Beskæftigelsesministeriets Område, 2026). In addition it is estimated that the Greenlandic consumer price index is 6-10% higher than in Denmark (DST Analyse, 2017). An example of health services was documented in a recent case from the Greenlandic town Maniitsoq. A young man suffered from a brain haemorrhage and experienced a six-month waiting time for recovery treatment from the municipal office in Maniitsoq. He then migrated to the Danish city of Aalborg. Within a week, he was offered a team of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and speech therapists. This immediately improved his condition. (Jensen, 2025). It is common for citizens in Greenland to mention long case processing times and subsequently a lack of quality in the public system. A woman talked about being unable to continue with her case processing in relation to being granted early retirement because she was declared chronically ill:

"I have been asking for many years to get a medical certificate in order to apply for early retirement. I have been waiting for years. At least two years – if not more – to get a medical certificate for my illness. I also contacted SANA [National Health Service] *to get a medical certificate, and I keep getting the answer that it is the municipality's job. I spoke to the departments I was admitted to the hospital and*

called them. The lady on the phone said I should contact the department, so I did, and they said they would, and nothing happened either. And I keep saying it must not stop, but it keeps stopping."

Lack of investment in building a welfare system, as in Scandinavia, has led to major differences within the unity of the realm, and this is a factor in migration.

In 2007, Inatsisartut [Parliament of Greenland] adopted a major municipal merger. This meant that 18 municipalities throughout the country were reduced to 4 large municipalities in 2009. (Landstingslov Om Strukturreform Af Den Kommunale Sektor, 2007).[2] This was supposed to make the public services more efficient but almost removed any local democracy. The new housing policy has led to housing construction in Nuuk, Sisimiut, Ilulissat, and Qaqortoq. This has resulted in increased centralization and urbanization, and outer areas are not being developed.

A welfare system is both legal, political, and economic structure. It has an impact on, for example, the number of people employed in the sector, allocation between public and private service, the financial allocations and the precise rate of economic benefits per citizen and the precise rate of economic benefits per citizen is estimated that there is a shortage of over 150 social workers in the Greenlandic municipalities. In the latest report the northernmost municipality has 4 out of 51 social work positions filled by a trained social worker. (Kilime & Holm, 2022). The social work education at the University of Greenland graduates 8-10 social workers annually. The professionalism that a homeless citizen requires is not always be provided. Greenland does not have any real shelters, where people are given a permanent bed, nationwide. The municipalities only established emergency shelters. They are usually open from 3 p.m. to 9 a.m. Shelters are managed as emergency shelters cannot replace permanent housing. Despite this, there are many cases of citizens who are forced to stay there for years without any real social support. A homeless person who has been staying at the shelter for several years must pack all belongings every morning, only to unpack them again every afternoon when she/he has re-registered for the evening and secured a place.

I: What about the staff at the shelter? Is their job also to help you further?

R: No, they just maintain peace and order. Yes. That's what they said. They didn't have resources for anything else.

It is debatable whether the responsibility for the improving homeless people's situation lies with the emergency shelter or elsewhere in the municipal system. The fact is that it is lacking. This leaves the citizen in a situation where it is almost impossible to get housed again when the shelters do not function as a social

2 There are currently 5 municipalities today

service with a plan of action for the citizen, but merely as an asylum from olden times. There is a general lack of target group division of vulnerable adults in the Greenlandic society (Arnfjord, 2016, 2019), as all vulnerable adults are categorized as one and the same target group. There is an evident lack of support for diverse needs, and even less understanding of the help requirements of the target group. One of the most striking examples of this is the approach to and understanding of homelessness. It is also a problem that the few resources mean that, in practice, everyone is offered the same service. Thus, the same service is given to people without a roof over their heads, regardless of their situation. This means that there is no distinction between homeless and non-homeless people, nor is there a distinction between other relevant conditions such as age, gender, and mental illness. A woman who is homeless talks about her experience of staying in a shelter. After a long life in the labour market, she became ill and consequently loses her home and job. Rather than receiving services corresponding to her situation as an ill and homeless person, the only municipal housing offer for her illness was to stay in a shelter.

"The thing about the shelter – it was difficult. There are many unpleasant situations where people who are in such a situation, where they are homeless. Fuses are short. It takes very little before arguments and fighting start up. Because they are in a very sensitive situation themselves, and I understand that very well; I am too [in a sensitive situation]."

A man talks about the difficulty of being able to hold down a job when he is forced to live in a hostel because there are always conflicts. *"Sometimes it's hard to sleep down there because some of the people who come into the shelter are drunk. You don't want them there. I walk around the city, just to rest a bit."* Despite the intention to reduce homelessness, a stay in a shelter it paradoxically increases the complexity of problems, as homeless individuals must stay in a harsh environment, where they often become worse off and build up a greater degree of vulnerability than before they entered the shelter system. An example of this can be that both their mental and financial resources are eroding. The same woman from the above quote says:

"When you're in a situation like that, we can all be a bit short-tempered. In a way, you throw in the towel and say: 'Get over it. I had come so far in my work situation and my living situation, then the money crumbled away – in a flash.'"

In addition to the above problems, there is also a capacity issue with the emergency shelter. A homeless person says that despite the Arctic climate, he slept in stair-wells when the shelter was full.

"I slept in stairwells because there was no space for us (at the shelter). Now I expect the cold to come soon, so it will be difficult to sleep in stairwells. It is many hours in the cold; time passes very slowly. It is so cold."

There is a long waiting time for alcohol treatment, family treatment, and acute measures such as psychiatric assessments, etc. This creates several chokepoints, which pushes citizens towards Denmark. Those citizens who are socially vulnerable but still have resources migrate to Denmark. Below, we will describe how welfare migration, when combined with limited preparation and barriers, gives rise to difficulties in Denmark, where significant differences in administrative systems and culture create challenges and may accelerate marginalization rather than alleviate it. Instead of functioning as a pathway to inclusion, the encounter with the Danish welfare system becomes a point of prolonged exclusion for some Greenlandic citizens.

Encountering Denmark – effects of structural violence

In the context of Greenlandic welfare migration, structural violence operates through administrative systems, legal frameworks, and welfare institutions that formally grant equal rights but in practice create unequal access. Rather than manifesting as direct discrimination, structural violence appears here as systemic barriers that prevent Greenlandic citizens from accessing welfare benefits, thereby reinforcing marginalization and homelessness.

A study by Schiermacher on migration in the relationship between Greenland and Denmark provided insight into how little preparation takes place prior to a move (Schiermacher, 2020a). As previously mentioned, it is often the case that welfare migration as a strategy requires the migrant to bring resources in the form of the ability to speak a little Danish, having a resourceful network, education, and money with them to access resources in the recipient country. This is also evident in the case of Greenlandic migrants, even if it's domestic travel. Setting off without preparation, but based on hope, is an expression of the mechanics of migration, which are called push and pull effects, and are a decisive factor in migration processes. This also applies to the migration we see from Greenland to Denmark for the vulnerable part of the population. The push factors in the home country are often linked to conditions such as unemployment, insecure housing conditions, and political unrest. They can also be more individual conditions, such as the need to get away from a conflict. These conditions motivate people to leave their place of birth (Lee, 1966). Pull factors are expectations of positive conditions in the destination country, such as job opportunities, higher living standards, and better educational opportunities that attract migrants to their new destination. Migration is influenced by an interaction between these conditions (ibid.).

There is no doubt that the housing crisis in Greenland is of great importance as a push factor and the reason behind many Greenlanders move to Denmark. The pull factor in the form of the housing market in Denmark does not meet this desire, and the realities are very different from what was expected. An informant from the homeless community talks about the feeling of powerlessness rather than hope after coming to Denmark.

"It takes a lot of energy out of you, it does. And you become increasingly powerless. You no longer have the joy you had when you came. You are more and more exhausted, and the fighting spirit you had when you came is disappearing."

The harsh realities are reinforced for those who have not brought the necessary resources to start a new life. It requires resources such as housing to establish yourselves in a new country. At the same time, you have the best chance of obtaining and keeping a home if you have a basis for support in place, such as a job or savings. Such preparations are rarely made by the vulnerable part of the Greenlandic population, who spontaneously move to Denmark without any further preparation other than dreams and hopes in their pockets. A woman who is now in the homeless environment in Denmark talks about the decision to leave Greenland after repeatedly becoming homeless in Greenland.

"I was installed in an apartment in Greenland. But then we were evicted. It was an accommodation for those who were homeless. I lived there until the apartment was to be demolished and I was evicted. Then I said, 'No, I'm going to Denmark.'"

But the encounter with Denmark does not live up to her expectations, and she had difficulties coping. Pushed out of Greenland she encounters homelessness again in Denmark; she continues her story:

"I was homeless here [in Denmark] for the first few months. I slept inside the Central Station with my husband. I just cried; I didn't dare tell my mother how I felt. You just shut your mouth about how you feel. In Denmark, however, you are met by a radically different and complex social system, and vulnerable environments that worsen one's risk of being more marginalized."

This is a human aspect of welfare migration: there are resources to be obtained, such as housing in Denmark, which will deprioritize and miscalculate the importance of one's own preparation, giving a better chance of being able to realize the dream. For example, bringing money for a deposit or a down payment for a home. An informant talks about his experience of leaving a job and a home in Greenland with no plans for how he would find employment and housing in Denmark:

"*I was impatient, so I left earlier than planned. The thing about leaving earlier or disorganized is that it makes you homeless when you come to Denmark. I experienced that myself. I was homeless for about two years before I got my own apartment.*"

The entrance to Danish society is largely tied to systemic conditions such as the CPR[3] number and a national registry address. It is therefore a very difficult start to arrive without having acquired a home and thus a national registry address in advance. If a Greenlander in Denmark does not have a national registry address, the systemic obstacles start piling up, and conditions of structural violence arise in the form of Greenlandic citizens being put in a systemic bind where, despite their Danish citizenship, they become invisible in the system and cannot document their rights as citizens in the unity of the realm. This only binds empirically visible systemic gaps in the unity of the realm, and it creates conditions of unequal access that arise only for Greenlandic citizens. For example, there is a problem regarding the fact that Greenlandic CPR numbers are not always active upon arrival in Denmark, even though they are assigned at birth to all members of the Danish state. This means, in practice, that a person from Greenland cannot always be identified upon arrival in Denmark. A CPR number will, for example, be activated through a national registry address. But as described, this is a group that most often does not have a home or a national registry address from the start, so an administrative bottleneck begins. Structural systemic violence occurs when Greenlandic citizens cannot access the rights they are entitled to for administrative reasons. One homeless informant talked about his feeling of being trapped in a Danish systemic labyrinth:

"*The system I encountered felt like I was constantly running into a wall. We asked for help, but they just mentioned a lot of legislation.*"

As the social sector underwent new digitalization processes, new barriers were created. The group of Greenlanders who were staying in Denmark without a national registry address constitutes a legal gap that is not considered when new digitalization processes are carried out. Another example was the transition from one public digital identity system to another, where a technical error occurred, preventing Greenlandic citizens without a national registry address from accessing mail from public authorities. The mail was considered to have been sent from the authority, but it was "systemically invisible" as the Greenlandic homeless informant could not access the system to open the mail. The municipality, therefore, sanctioned the citizen on the basis that the citizens were not informed about it. The person did not have the opportunity to meet demands that he was not informed about, since he could not access the post. Situations such as the above often cause major problems for citizens in the form of, for example, sanctions on benefits. These are situations that are difficult to resolve, as they are invisible in the system, and the people

3 Central persons registry (personal identification number)

affected often have difficulty navigating an administrative labyrinth. From a purely human perspective, these experiences cause a lot of frustration. An informant from the homeless community describes her experiences:

"It's so condescending. When you're so frustrated, needing so much help, and you're down in the dumps, and then you're talked to like that. You're treated like that by the system, by the people who work there. My husband and I haven't been drinking in many, many years. I got so frustrated right there, I just wanted to go out and drink. I haven't been drunk in over thirty years."

In relation to other groups, efforts are made to help social groups gain a foothold in society. For example, refugees are placed in housing, and other migration groups receive offers of municipal integration programs. For Greenlanders, there are no culturally appropriate services based on their Danish citizenship. This is paradoxical given that Denmark ratified the ILO convention in 1996 (Udenrigsministeriet, 1997) but without implementing it. As previously mentioned, free movement means that there are no official bodies from which Greenlandic migrants can seek help. They are Danish citizens by birth and should be able to cope and should be able to access their civil rights. However, the reality looks very different. An informant from the homeless community talks about his experience of seeing his fellow countrymen unable to cope in the "Danish system".

"There are many of them who can't really express themselves in Danish and don't understand. I think that's what's wrong with moving down here: it's a lot of trouble, or whatever you want to say. You must be able to do that. If you're going to move, with a one-way ticket, then you must be able to speak Danish. Otherwise, you end up down there, and it ends up taking far too long to help those people because of the language. Then they just give up."

The municipality feels more like an obstacle course than a place that provides welfare. An informant from the homeless community puts it this way*:*

"When I contacted the municipality, they talk to you as if you were an ignorant person. A subhuman."

Another informant from the homeless community talks about her and her husband meeting the Danish job centre system and not being able to explain that her husband suffers from an occupational injury as a ship painter and has developed epilepsy.

R: He has painted many ships. Without a mask. The doctors think this paint, which they used at the time, is the reason. He painted without a mask, and the paint has gone up to his brain.

I: But has he applied for a pension for that?

R: We can't do that.

I: When you go to these kinds of conversations with the job centre, is there anyone who helps you, or is it just the two of you who talk to the municipality?

R: No, no. No one has taught us how. Never (sighs).

The above review and empirical examples show that the welfare part of welfare migration is difficult to achieve for Greenlandic citizens who migrate to Denmark without resources or preparation. They experience structural violence when they were confronted by systemic barriers such as a complex system, multiple bureaucracies, and a Western understanding that sometimes counters indigenous ways of life. Even though they should be extra protected by the ILO convention, the opposite seems to be the case.

Roads to homelessness

The number of broken dreams and the many empirical accounts of structural barriers mentioned above point to an increased marginalization process. A Greenlandic woman who has been in Copenhagen for a short time and encountered systemic barriers everywhere. She talked about feeling powerless. This led to:

"I can understand all the Greenlanders who move down here and that it ends up in drinking. They become indifferent to themselves, and many die from it. It ends up in vodka every day – right from the morning until they fall over."

She goes on to talk about seeing many of her fellow countrymen who are offered help when it is too late – when marginalization results in exclusion.

"I have heard of someone who has been given an opportunity, and she then became accustomed to the environment she is in now, where she is completely destroyed by drinking and everything. She cannot afford to return to a normal life. She was given an opportunity and things like that. A few months later, she also lost that opportunity."

An experience of powerlessness that is only amplified if you are pressured to meet basic needs such as food, sleep, and lack of security in the form of a place to stay. A woman from the homeless community says,

"*It's very hard. Many of my acquaintances, friends and girlfriends who have moved here, I haven't seen for several years. They are just completely destroyed by drinking. They were functioning well at home [in Greenland], had jobs, had an apartment and didn't drink."*

The structural violence in the form of administrative rejections from the municipality contributes to them seeking help from fellow countrymen rather than through the Danish system. In this situation, where both the private housing market and the social housing allocation seem like an impossible path, there are primarily two survival strategies in play to avoid ending up directly on the street: either by spending the night with friends and acquaintances or by looking for a room at a hostel. In both cases, it is to seek out visible help because they visually and socially identify other Greenlanders in the street scene whom they approach in the hope of assistance. An informant says, for example, that while they were collecting bottles to survive, her husband saw the Greenlandic flag (Erfalasorput) on the street and sought help because of it:

"So, he saw the Greenlandic flag, [and thought] what was going it? So, he went over to them."

There is a great willingness to help each other and offer their sofas to others, even if they do not have any resources themselves. One informant says:

"We help each other; if you have nothing, you always give a little. If you have nowhere to sleep, you can use my sofa. If you do not have any cigarettes, you can get one from me."

However, it is a double-edged sword to seek help through street networks, as staying in such environments often means an escalation in vulnerability for those who seek help. It is a safe place to stay. One informant talks about her experience where an acquaintance had offered her and her husband a place to sleep when they arrived in Denmark, which then turned out to be a hostel room.

"Initially, we were going to stay with an acquaintance. But it turned out he lived in a shelter. We stayed there for a couple of weeks. We stayed with him, but I didn't know it was a shelter. It just went downhill [from there]. Suddenly, there we were. So, I told him, 'We can't stay here.'"

Living in vulnerable environments may escalate a social situation. Both contemporary and classic literature on homelessness research shows that living in such environments often complicates vulnerability further. (Hopper, 2003; Shinn, 2010; Spradley, 1979).

Rather than finding peace, it often causes even more stress and fewer resources to find a place of your own, as it is rarely free to live like a sofa surfer. Often, it is only a short-term solution that rarely lasts long, either because you outstay your welcome or because it becomes too problematic to stay with those who offered to help. An informant talks about sleeping with friends and acquaintances instead of having a place of their own:

"We couldn't stand being there, also because we have heard that she might smoke crack and things like that. The first thing she drinks when she wakes up in the morning is vodka. But she hasn't been like that. She has a well-functioning life at home. She had a husband, children, and a job, and a nice apartment. I don't really know what happened. I had no idea it was so bad."

The other option is to seek shelter, which is a discrepancy from the purpose they had in mind for welfare migration. In both cases of staying overnight with friends and acquaintances and seeking shelter, it is a problematic path into Danish society, which impacts how life in Denmark is shaped through vulnerable environments rather than through normal society. Among professionals in Denmark who encounter the target group, there is often astonishment about a lack of preparation before migration to Denmark, and a impression from professionals that many Greenlandic migrants enter a problematic environment without prior experience of such environments. An employee at a shelter in Copenhagen said:

"I think that they understand this place as a place where you live. Not as a shelter, but as a place where you can rent a small apartment, a small room. But of course, it is also probably a special group of Greenlanders. I think that if you are a completely well-functioning Greenlander, you will probably notice some other things here."

We had a conversation with a young craftsman at a Danish youth centre. He explained that he was working back in Greenland until he went to Copenhagen, Denmark. He was then asked why he was sleeping in a shelter:

I: When did you come to Copenhagen?

R: It's been a month today.

I: Where do you sleep then?

R: Hillerødgade in the night café.

I: How did you find out about it? That you could sleep there?

R: One of our acquaintances, he lived there in Hillerødgade, and so he says you can spend the night there.

A stay at a shelter is rarely just a roof over your head. It comes with an environment filled with a long list of complex issues. Shelter life can have many consequences in these environments, and unfortunately, there is often an escalation, such as violence, crime, abuse, and re-traumatization. In other words, it is the opposite of achieving success through migration. Environments associated with a stay at a hostel are areas full of problems; they aggravate whatever trauma or social problems a Greenlandic citizen might bring, for which they have often not received help, since, as mentioned, there is no integration offer. Problems that could have been

alleviated, such as a diagnosis or incipient abuse, are instead exacerbated. In short, people who are not part of a shelter's target group seek out the shelter anyway and eventually end up as the target group.

When people struck by homelessness seek a shelter a paradoxical situation occurs. Survival becomes dependent on available services there, but the shelter environment and other shelter users pose a danger of worsening the situation by escalating problems and vulnerabilities. In several cases, this ends in death. An informant talks about her husband, who took his own life while living in a shelter:

"Unfortunately, he took his own life there, and it has been hard. I have been one of the lucky ones, I would say, but the costs have been high. I lost my husband… I think it was a high price."

A further problem is that, for a significant part of Greenlandic citizens, temporarily stay at a shelter, instead becomes a permanent stay, which is not the purpose of the shelters. This means that the long period reinforces their homeless situation rather than remedying it. Rather than achieving the intended dreams and prepared living conditions that were the purpose, the shelter instead becomes both the encounter with and the final destination in the new life in Denmark. As one homeless informant puts it:

"You're here until the day you die from drinking or drugs. You can easily get in, but you can't get out again. The exit is blocked, and there's no emergency exit. This is the final destination. This is the gate to hell."

Conclusion

In Greenland the waiting lists for public housing can span decades and then a significant rent for public housing and poor health and social conditions becomes push factors, combined with expectations about better welfare services in Denmark (pull factors), motivate Greenlanders to engage in welfare migration. We have anayzed how the realities in Denmark are often far from the expectations, especially for those without sufficient resources. Greenlanders are entitled to Danish welfare services, and those who move to Denmark should therefore be able to benefit from the welfare system, such as social benefits, health services, or housing. However, despite citizenship, several conditions work against their ability to achieve these improved living standards. The cumulative constellation of barriers encountered in interactions with Denmark inadvertently gives rise to structural violence by systematically impeding equitable access to social services, thereby exacerbating the individual's socioeconomic and cultural conditions.

Even though they travel within the same state, and conditions such as structural violence should be avoided by virtue of rights through the ILO Convention, which is meant to ensure good living standards as an indigenous people. The situation is paradoxical in relation to the fact that Greenlandic citizens, in their encounter with Denmark, on paper have "double" rights by virtue of citizenship and the ILO Convention, but in reality, don't enjoy these intended rights. Rights through citizenship are systemically blocked for a part of the population that does not have an address, and the dynamics of homelessness increases problems. The Danish welfare system is not sufficiently adapted to accommodate Greenlandic culture and language, which creates significant barriers for Greenlanders who have difficulty navigating the system and obtaining the necessary help. When the Danish state ratified the ILO Convention, it specified that the only indigenous people in the state are the Inuit (Udenrigsministeriet, 1997). A sound step to breaking down barriers would be to follow chapter 2 section 2 and: *ensure that members of these peoples benefit on an equal footing from the rights and opportunities which national laws and regulations grant to other members of the population*. Further initiatives could be to increase an understanding of Greenlandic/Inuit culture in the social sector, guides, and legislation in Greenlandic. So far, the convention has not been implemented. Instead, Greenlandic citizens experience systematic discrimination and marginalization in the Danish welfare system, including a lack of translation and interpretation, which makes it difficult for them to understand and access their case processing. It is a paradoxical situation where a desire to improve living conditions results instead result in a worsening of some Greenlanders living conditions.

In Denmark there is a lack of knowledge about systemic conditions that worsen the living conditions of vulnerable Greenlandic citizens. At the same time, there is a lack of awareness of the opportunities that already exist to remedy the situation, such as using the ILO Convention in practice. This lack of knowledge contributes to maintaining and perpetuating structural violence against Greenlandic citizens, which characterizes their lives and worsens vulnerable living conditions such as homelessness.

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