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HIDDEN IN TRANSIT: COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN DENMARK

In the modern world, transnational crime continues to evolve in complexity, transcending borders and challenging even the most advanced legal and security systems. Denmark, while recognized as one of the most stable and secure countries in Europe, continues to face a range of criminal challenges, including drug trafficking, cybercrime, arms smuggling, and financial crimes. Among these issues, human trafficking stands out as a critical and persistent violation of fundamental rights, necessitating a thorough analysis of its scope and the state's response based on internationally recognized sources.

Denmark is a destination and transit point for human trafficking and is the main link between mainland Europe and Scandinavia. The phenomenon of human trafficking in Denmark is primarily characterized by sexual exploitation, yet in recent years, there has been an observable increase in labour exploitation, including forced work in construction, agriculture, domestic service, and cleaning sectors. According to data presented in the OC Index Denmark 2023 profile, most victims originate from Nigeria, Romania, Thailand, the Philippines, and North African countries, and include undocumented workers, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, young men, individuals engaged in commercial sex work, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. This demonstrates that trafficking in Denmark is not limited to a single demographic group but rather affects a wide spectrum of vulnerable populations.

Denmark's role as both a destination and transit country is reinforced by its geographical position, acting as a gateway between continental Europe and the rest of the Nordic region. Traffickers often exploit Denmark's advanced transport infrastructure and its proximity to Sweden and Norway, enabling the movement of victims further north. Despite Denmark's strong legislative and institutional framework, a substantial "dark figure" of unreported victims persists, indicating that official statistics likely underestimate the true scale of the problem. Government data cited according to reports show a decline in the number of officially identified victims in 2024 compared to previous years; however, expert analysis suggests this decline reflects identification challenges rather than an actual reduction in trafficking activities [1].

The Danish government has acknowledged the seriousness of human trafficking and continues to implement the 2022–2025 National Action Plan to combat trafficking in human beings. This national plan prioritizes victim assistance, interagency cooperation, cross-border collaboration, and preventive measures, including online monitoring of trafficking indicators [2]. The Center against Human Trafficking (CMM) plays a crucial role in coordinating governmental and non-governmental efforts, identifying victims, and providing them with assistance. Nevertheless, according to information from published sources, a significant proportion of identified victims do not receive state assistance due to legal and procedural barriers, especially those

without legal residency status. Some victims are treated primarily as undocumented migrants and face detention or deportation, undermining their access to justice and rehabilitation.

Section 262(a) of the Danish Criminal Code criminalizes both sexual and labour trafficking and prescribes penalties of up to ten years' imprisonment for traffickers, aligning with international legal standards [1]. However, enforcement challenges persist. The government has reported investigations and convictions of traffickers in recent years; however, NGOs and independent experts highlight that limited resources, heavy reliance on victim testimonies, and high evidentiary thresholds contribute to early case closures or the prosecution of offenders under lesser non-trafficking statutes, ultimately resulting in reduced penalties [3]. Furthermore, trafficking victims are occasionally penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct consequence of their exploitation, despite provisions in Section 722(2) of the Administration of Justice Act that should prevent such penalization.

Victim protection mechanisms in Denmark are relatively advanced compared to those in many European countries. The U.S. Department of State's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Denmark notes the availability of specialized shelters, healthcare, psychological services, vocational training, and reintegration programs funded by the government. Female victims are supported through specialized shelters operated by NGOs, while male victims may be accommodated in crisis centers. Additionally, Denmark provides a reflection and recovery period of up to 120 days for foreign victims, allowing temporary stay and support regardless of cooperation with law enforcement. However, only a small number of victims receive temporary residence permits, and those who do are often required to leave the country after the recovery period unless they agree to voluntary repatriation. This limited residency policy has been criticized by human rights organizations, which argue that it deters victims from cooperating with authorities and undermines long-term rehabilitation.

Preventive measures include awareness campaigns, monitoring online platforms used for recruitment, and international cooperation. Danish authorities collaborate with the Nordic Council of Ministers, EUROPOL, and other European agencies to share intelligence and conduct joint operations. Traffickers increasingly use digital tools and social media to target vulnerable individuals, necessitating advanced

cyber monitoring strategies [4]. The CMM has responded by developing trafficking indicators for internet-based victim identification, reflecting a shift in trafficking methods toward the digital sphere.

In terms of criminal justice response, Denmark's law enforcement agencies are regarded as professional and well-equipped, with specialized units dedicated to organized crime and trafficking investigations. The South Jutland Police and the National Special Crimes Unit conduct cross-regional investigations and collaborate internationally. However, disparities between police districts in investigative procedures are observed, emphasizing the need for a more uniform approach to trafficking investigations and enhanced training for frontline officers [5].

Although Denmark is recognized globally as one of the least corrupt countries with a highly stable government, trafficking persists due to structural vulnerabilities, including migration flows, asylum pressures, and the presence of organized criminal networks operating across borders [2]. Criminal actors active in trafficking include both domestic gangs and transnational groups that use Denmark as a strategic transit hub. These networks also engage in related criminal markets, such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering, reinforcing the connection between trafficking and broader organized crime.

In conclusion, Denmark's efforts to combat human trafficking are comprehensive and supported by a robust legal and institutional framework, yet significant gaps remain in victim identification, protection, and prosecution effectiveness. The persistence of a large hidden population of victims, the growing use of digital tools in trafficking operations, and the challenges in securing long-term protection for victims underscore the need for continued reform and enhanced international cooperation. As Denmark continues to implement its 2022–2025 National Action Plan, its experience serves as a vital case study for balancing national security, human rights, and international obligations in the ongoing fight against human trafficking.

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CRIME PREVENTION IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

With the development of the rule of law, the issues of protection of the rights and freedoms of all citizens become especially relevant. According to the Constitution of Ukraine “a person, his life and health, honor and dignity, inviolability and security are recognized the highest social value”, and the main obligation of the state - the establishment and protection of human rights and freedoms (Article 3) [2]. Therefore, human trafficking is a gross violation is used at the international level as a crime punishable by law.