

The Nest-STOP Trafficking's Work Combating Trafficking in Women in Denmark

Background

Since 1990 we have witnessed a sharp increase in the number of women in prostitution in Denmark, rising from an estimated 1,700 in 1990, to at least 4,270 in 2006. At the same time we have seen an increase in the number of foreign women on the street and in the approximately 700 brothels and massage parlours in Denmark. It is clear that there are women in Denmark who have been trafficked. It is estimated that three quarters of the women in prostitution on the streets of Vesterbro in Copenhagen are foreign, and that at least half of the women in prostitution in brothels are foreign.

Prostitution is not illegal in Denmark, but it is not considered an occupation. Neither is it illegal to purchase prostitution services in Denmark, though it is illegal - and punishable - to purchase prostitution from young persons under the age of 18. Foreign women in prostitution in Denmark are therefore not arrested by the police for prostitution, but rather for earning money without a valid work permit, or for residing in the country illegally. In this way women are often deported for working illegally, or for illegal residence, with very short notice. Women who are victims of trafficking are therefore often treated as criminals and deported, with no consideration for their situation, other than the offer of a 15 day delay of their deportation date.

Who is RSK?

Reden-STOP Kvindehandel (The Nest-STOP Trafficking in Women) is a private institution under the YMCA's Social Work. YMCA's Social Work also runs the "Reden" drop-in centres for women in prostitution and drug abuse, in Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus, and has over 20 years experience working with women in prostitution and drug addiction.

RSK receives public funding over a three-year period (October 2003-December 2006) for the implementation of the social component of the Danish national action plan for combating trafficking in women. The focus of this work is on women who are victims

of trafficking, and foreign women in prostitution in Denmark. The work of RSK consists of four concrete social initiatives:

- A countrywide shelter/protection programme for women who are victims of trafficking,
- Outreach work among foreign women in prostitution on the streets of Vesterbro, in Copenhagen,
- Outreach work in brothels and massage parlours in the Copenhagen area.
- A countrywide, anonymous, advisory hotline on prostitution and trafficking in women, that is open weekdays from 10 am to 5 pm.

Shelter/Protection Programme for Women who are Victims of Trafficking

In our protection programme we help women in acute need via advisory services and humane care-giving, in the period before they are sent home. The women reside at a location away from the prostitution environment, where they receive the offer of health, social, and legal counselling. For example we contact the hospital system, requisition psychological crisis help or legal support, when required. If the women wish, RSK also contacts organisations in the native country that help women who have been trafficked to return home safely. Currently there is no legal possibility for these women to obtain permanent residency in Denmark, with the exception of applying for refugee status. In the time that we have worked with these women, none have obtained asylum in Denmark based on their situation as a victim of trafficking in women. We also meet many women from EU countries, and these women are not routinely deported but are often fined and released if the police arrest them for prostitution. However they often require help with acute needs and returning home, and we also work with them.

Outreach work on the streets of Vesterbro, and in brothels and massage parlours in the Copenhagen area is carried out by RSK's teams of social workers. The social workers have a number of years of experience in working with women in prostitution, and collectively speak 16 languages – allowing us often to communicate

with the women in their own language. They look for the women on the street or in brothels, in order to offer information and counselling. The help can be of a medical, social, or legal nature.

On the street we distribute condoms, lubricant, and nonoxynol9 (for use in the case of a broken condom), as well as business cards so that the women can find our office and contact us by phone. After almost two years of constant outreach work on the street, RSK has obtained a good knowledge of the environment, and a feeling for the women we meet there. It is to a large extent in this environment that we have met women who are victims of trafficking, and we can conclude that this phenomenon not only exists, but is growing in Denmark.

In the brothels we distribute, in addition to condoms and lubricant, information on safe prostitution behaviour, free health services in the Copenhagen area, help initiatives for victims of trafficking in women, and naturally also information on how women can contact RSK, and in which ways we can help them. In total, outreach work has been carried out at 119 different brothels and massage parlours in the Copenhagen area, and we have been invited inside 80 brothels, where we have carried out information and advisory sessions.

We have met foreign women of many different nationalities in the brothels. Approximately one third of the women are Thai, and the rest are evenly divided between Eastern European, African, and South American women. For this reason, we have since March 2005 especially focused on outreach work at the Thai places.

The countrywide, anonymous, telephone advisory hotline on trafficking in women and prostitution – 70 20 25 50 – opened in November 2002. Here we receive calls regarding trafficking in women and prostitution, from foreign and Danish women in prostitution, buyers of prostitution, our working partners, or the general public interested in this area. A written counselling and information e-mail service, via info@kvindehandel.dk, as well as a website, at www.trafficking.dk, are attached to the telephone advisory service.

The Women We Meet in the Course of Our Social Work

Since we began our social work in 2003, we have met no less than 720 different foreign women in prostitution on the street, in brothels, at police stations, in the asylum system, and in jails. We have come in contact with most of the women via outreach work on the street, or via the police. Since the beginning of 2005, we have also experienced that we have become so well known within the various networks, that women we have not met have heard of our work via other women, and contacted us.

The women we meet request first and foremost access to different health services. It can be a question of women who need free, anonymous examinations for venereal diseases, gynaecological specialist help, and abortion. It is also our experience that the general condition of health among the women is very poor, and that they often need additional specialist medical help and dental help.

On the street we meet first and foremost Eastern European and Nigerian women. Since the fall of the Berlin wall, a steadily increasing number of Eastern European women have been in prostitution in Vesterbro. These women are often closely watched by Eastern European pimps, and are often on the street for many hours at a time. In the beginning of 2004 we observed more and more Nigerian women in our street work – a tendency that appears to be steadily rising. These women are often seen in groups, and are not watched by traffickers on the street, but are subject to another and far more complex surveillance system. RSK does not doubt that it is a question of very, organised criminal networks exploiting both groups of women – an impression that is shared by the police.

We have also experienced that there are many foreign women in the approximately 700 brothels that are found in Denmark. We have had women referred to protection from brothels in many different parts of the country, and experience that there can be found women from the whole world for sale in prostitution, all over Denmark.

The 70 women who have lived in RSK's shelter since October 2003 were naturally very different. The women and girls, who were between 17-38 years of age, came from 14 different countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa, and therefore had widely different cultural backgrounds and levels of experience. 40% of the women have come from EU countries such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania,

Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. 60% have come from countries outside the EU, such as Nigeria, Uganda, Brasil, Colombia, Ecuador, Bulgaria, and Romania. The largest number from any single country is from Nigeria, from where we have had 18 women in the protection programme. 60% of the women were over 25 years of age, and 5% were under 18 years of age. Over half of the women were unmarried, but 70% referred to breadwinner responsibilities as an important reason for their path into prostitution. One third of the women had their debut in prostitution in Denmark, after being trafficked to the country.

The women and girls had come to Denmark in different ways, with a hope for a better future. Some believed they were coming to participate in educational programmes, and thereafter find work. Some believed they were coming to marry a Danish man under genuine conditions. Some knew that they would enter prostitution, but believed it was a question of a situation that they would have full control over, and not a situation where traffickers would decide with whom, what, and how often the sexual services would take place, and where only very little of the money earned from their prostitution would go to the women themselves.

In spite of all their differences, they all had the following things in common when they entered RSK's protection programme:

- They were all in crisis over their situation and their future
- They had all been subjected to violence and rape
- Many had debt to traffickers who threatened horrible reprisals, if they did not remain in prostitution until this was repaid
- They had no, or very little, money when they left Denmark
- Their safety in their native country was very uncertain

Within the action plan's limit of a 15-day delay of the departure deadline for deportation, we were able to offer care giving at a location far from the prostitution environment, pimps and traffickers. We could offer limited medical help, and naturally conversations in order to try to find a way out of their current situation. When the woman has wished it, we have contacted a NGO in the native country, which could meet her at the airport and thereafter offer protection and reintegration programmes.

Only very few women in the protection programme have been addicted to drugs, for which we have had to perform genuine detoxification in collaboration with the municipality of Copenhagen's Medical Authorities.

In 2004 the authorities opened for the possibility that we can apply for an extension of a woman's stay if necessary, and the Danish Immigration Service has considered this possibility on a per case basis. However, it is only a question of short extensions of 1-2 weeks.

We have worked with **5 young girls under the age of 18**, who were arrested on the street or in brothels. In 2004 we initiated a close collaboration with Save the Children, the Danish Red Cross, and Copenhagen Municipality's Programme for marginalized youth, to support and help the young girls. All the girls were deported, and they were given contact to a NGO in their native country, that works with trafficked women and/or children and youths. Three of the girls were escorted to their native country by an RSK employee in order to ensure that they arrived home without problems, came through airport formalities in their native country, and were handed over to a partner organisation in their native country. In this way, the girls were met in the airport by a local NGO that could help them with reintegration into society. A Danish national action plan to combat trafficking in children has recently been made public as a supplement to the action plan to combat trafficking in women.

Partners

We have a positive cooperation with all partners. Naturally we work together with other institutions falling under YMCA's Social Work, such as the "Reden" organisations in Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. We cooperate with the Danish Centre for Research on Social Vulnerability (DCR/SV), Pro Vejle, and Prostitution and Trafficking in Women in Aarhus. This cooperation is centred around experience exchange, methods, documentation, and material development. Our most important operational partner is the police, with whom we have a good and constructive cooperation focused on helping victims of trafficking in women. Since 2003 we have cooperated with 19 specific police districts on cases concerning foreign women in prostitution. This is necessary as it is often through the police that we meet women after they have been arrested for illegal work, or illegal residency.

An international NGO network to be used when women are sent home is also established and constantly under development. In 2004 and 2005 RSK has undertaken study tours to Belgium, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the Ukraine. Here we have met with different involved parties, for example responsible governmental ministries, police, national reporters, and NGOs. We have especially stressed meeting with other NGOs who work with the return of women to native countries, in order to expand cooperation and exchange of experience in this area.

We also work with the media and private organisations, such as Soroptimist International, in order to obtain increased focus on trafficking in women.

Future Challenges

In light of our experiences from the last two years of work with foreign women in prostitution and their life situations, we have the following suggestions for improvements in the area:

- RSK suggests – in agreement with the EU’s expert group in this area – that women who are victims of trafficking in women, are offered at least a 3 month stay for clarification of their situation, and for acute help of a medical, social, and legal nature. Experience has shown that the possibility for a 15 day stay is a great help for some, but too short for most of the women we meet. This applies to an even greater extent when there is a question of minors, for whom Denmark has other obligations than for adults according to the UN Convention on the Right’s of the Child. In this case the 15 day stay is not sufficient, since it is not possible to take care of acute needs and ensure a safe return home to the country of origin in such a short time.
- RSK suggests that women who are victims of trafficking in women, be treated as people who have been subjected to a criminal act and offered help – instead of jail and deportation. The possibility to obtain asylum on the background of a past as a victim of trafficking in women should be introduced for the protection of the women who risk their life if they are sent home. It is problematic that women, who are victims of trafficking in

women in Denmark, are in reality treated as criminals and not as victims of a crime. This is not consistent with the UN's Palermo Protocol which Denmark ratified in 2003, and which specifically states that all victims of human trafficking must be protected.

- RSK suggests that there be allocated earmarked resources to the police for investigation purposes. Since 2002, 3 cases have been tried in court with respect to the penal codes §262a, concerning human trafficking. The maximum penalty is 8 years, but the 8 convicted only received between 1 and 3 years and 9 months `prisansentnæs. It is a challenge for a law-abiding society to see the abuse that takes place daily, and to at the same time observe that more cases are not investigated. The explanation is not that no results are expected from an investigation, but that police resources are not available.
- RSK suggests that initiatives are introduced that make it much more difficult for pimps and traffickers to traffic women to prostitution in Denmark, and lower the huge current profits. Information on the harmful effects of prostitution should be, to a greater extent, widely publicised in order to attempt to influence the demand for prostitution. A Danish model with a ban on purchasing should be introduced to reduce the demand for women in prostitution, since current Danish law makes it easy and lucrative to traffic in women to prostitution in Denmark. At the same time, social initiatives should be intensified as a part of the government's work to give other possibilities to the women who are already in prostitution.

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