

Denmark:

The holistic and human-to-human approach of HopeNow

<https://hopenow.dk/>

HopeNow was established in 2007 to support the empowerment and human rights of trafficked people, building on experiences and activities initiated several years earlier. In 2003, Reden International engaged Michele Mildwater and a team of social workers to develop an outreach methodology and assist the rehabilitation of foreign women in forced prostitution in Denmark. The work was part of the first Danish Action plan to Combat Human Trafficking and the identified women were from different parts of the world. Later in 2004, Michele was engaged to assist a trafficked Nigerian girl of 16 years and accompany her back to Nigeria. This experience led to more collaboration with Nigerian women resulting in a report based upon 30 case studies: "Nigerian women in prostitution in Denmark." (Roskilde University). The focus on Nigeria was strengthened in the following years when Michele collaborated with Anja Dalhoff in developing the documentary: "Trapped", which for the first time showed how trafficked women from Nigeria were imprisoned in Denmark and then being deported with a high risk of being re-trafficked. After receiving the Ankor award in 2007 for work with vulnerable women and the documentary Trapped, Michele and the Human Rights Lawyer Anne Brandt Christensen, formally established HopeNow.

HopeNow applies a holistic and multidisciplinary approach when meeting with victims of human trafficking. The team is multidisciplinary and includes expertise from the fields of migration, law, anthropology, social work, trauma therapy, cultural mediation, and IT. Staff, volunteers, and interns represent a multitude of social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds with different professional skills. Furthermore, the organisation has developed therapeutic methods that integrate elements from the clients' own culture and while discussing the situation verbally a strong focus is on the bodily, somatic impact. Taking time to listen and avoid asking too many questions are viewed as important.

Another success factor of HopeNow is having built a platform for survivors to communicate in-between themselves and for some to become national champions and spokespersons. Survivors involvement is essential for developing relevant methodologies and for the individual survivor to internalise that change is possible. Patience is necessary and a supportive self-appreciation since in the end, the main key to change is yourself and the choices you make. Quite a few HopeNow clients have over time managed to create new lives despite the multitude of difficulties.

Challenges regarding safety and organisational strengthening

In the beginning, the focus of HopeNow was with women from Africa, trafficked into prostitution in the streets or other types of forced sex work and cleaning work. Since 2009, the work also includes other forms of human trafficking and embraces both male and female victims of many nationalities. East and West African women are still the largest group identified by HopeNow but increasingly African men are also identified as exploited into forced crime including drug pushing and as forced labour in various industries. Some African men have even been identified in brothels. Many trafficked persons became victims before the age of 18 and some women become traffickers/madams after they have paid their debts.

The main challenge for victims of human trafficking is that very few are officially identified. This contrasts with for instance HopeNow providing services for an increasing number of people each year with a trafficking background but who are not registered as trafficked. One of the factors that cause this situation is the tendency to arrest and criminalise people who are exploited in other areas apart from prostitution or who have been involved as part of the trafficking set-up in a criminal act, such as fraud. The restrictive policy of granting stay permits, even if a person is identified as trafficked and almost without regard of the severity of their situation, remains a major obstacle. Additionally, even if trafficking is recognized, it is mainly regarded as a private matter and does therefore not provide the grounds for long term protection in Denmark, or temporary access to the work market. Traffickers have a lot of power when a victim lacks a place to stay or permission to reside in Denmark other than as a tourist. Many of the most vulnerable persons are arrested for illegal work or other charges.

HopeNow is also facing challenges in ensuring financial resources and creating enough trust with law enforcement, politicians, and institutions to continue to carry out their innovative work with enough staff. To facilitate an effective communication with authorities HopeNow attends network meetings and are proactive to cooperate and offer trainings with law enforcement and the special anti-trafficking tax department. Financial constraints have become a serious matter and an NGO can only seek donations through their website if they can show that they have 300 paid members and 100 donations over 200 danish crowns. Furthermore, Denmark is the only EU country that is excluded from seeking funding from EU mechanisms related to migration and trafficking.

Cooperation as part of the national work against trafficking

HopeNow is an independent non-governmental organisation with a mandate to combat human trafficking. It is a diverse organisation relying heavily on volunteers in all spheres, from outreach and fundraising to the administration and the Board. Approximately twenty engaged women and men with different ethnic backgrounds devote their time to the organisation on a voluntary basis. Michele Mildwater is the Director of HopeNow.

Since 2008, HopeNow and the Danish Red Cross Asylum department has cooperated closely and in particular with the women's and children's centre which accommodated victims of human trafficking applying for asylum. This long-time cooperation created a synergy making it possible to identify more victims of trafficking, build trust and acquire in-depth knowledge about the mechanisms surrounding human trafficking. The knowledge accumulated over many years has been used to develop good practices and methods of empowerment and is still being used by HopeNow even after the above-mentioned cooperation came to an end in 2018.

The Danish Centre against Human Trafficking as part of the National Board of Social Services, is currently the most important government partner. This Centre is responsible for the nationwide social efforts to combat human trafficking under the National Action Plan, while the department of Gender Equality is the coordinating entity. Hopenow continues its cooperation with the two other NGOs: Ami Ami and Reden International.

HopeNow has received funding since 2011 through the Danish National Action Plan to Combat Human trafficking to carry out outreach work in the streets, in prisons, in asylum centres and similar places to identify victims of trafficking. HopeNow counsel, support and empower victims of human trafficking, investigate new tendencies and situations of human trafficking, and develop relevant methodologies. Over the years, more than 10,000 persons have been in contact with the organisation and more than

2000 individuals have been provided with support. On a monthly basis, a couple of serious cases may come to the attention of HopeNow which are carefully followed-up.

However, the current funding by the National Action Plan ends in 2021, making the continued basic funding uncertain. HopeNow hopes to continue to receive smaller funding from foundations and private donors in addition to free services from volunteers. This year the salary of a peer group worker will be funded by one donor and work is ongoing to ensure her salary for 2021.

Between 2015-2018 the organisation received funding from the department of Gender to focus on possible victims of trafficking within the areas of escort and private sex work. HopeNow identified 69 women, who were trafficked into this hidden area which previously was regarded as a sole domain of independent sex workers. In another project funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during 2014-2018, HopeNow cooperated with the Kenyan NGO HAART. Together the two organisations developed awareness programmes for schools, villages, and slum areas to prevent women and men being exploited and trafficked to Europe and the Middle East.

Mission, vision, and success factors

The mission of HopeNow is to seek, find, identify, and work supportively and motivationally with men, women, and children who are marginalised, stigmatised, and often criminalised because of human trafficking. The organisation seeks to empower and support each person within their specific circumstance to achieve a direct improvement of their situation. The relationship with the survivors is built over time and they are continuously followed up to establish durable solutions. From a legal perspective human trafficking is where criminal law, immigration law and human rights law intersect. Therefore, an important part of the efforts to advance long-term positive change lies in advocacy and legal interventions. HopeNow has created precedents in law by reversing criminalisation of trafficked persons that protect people's human rights.

The holistic approach used by HopeNow addresses each person's psycho-social, economic, and legal needs within their specific cultural context. Human trafficking involves a large global criminal network that requires a coordinated response and intervention from a wide range of social, political, and economic actors. HopeNow seeks to disrupt the business of human trafficking by setting achievable goals for the survivors and by raising awareness in society.

Outreach is the main methodology to reach trafficked people and flexibility is important as HopeNow works with groups who are highly mobile and often dictated by the will of the traffickers or "madams". HopeNow meet and talk with vulnerable female and male migrant workers on a weekly basis and attend informal activities in spaces that are frequented by potential victims of human trafficking. In addition, HopeNow meet people in prisons, asylum centres, drop-in centres, and brothels. Peer group workers take part in weddings, funerals, and church services to further get acquainted with the possible environment of trafficked persons. HopeNow support possible victims of trafficking with legal and medical assistance.

Happily, not all the many people HopeNow encounter are trafficked. The great achievement though is the informal network that has been built over the years with those reached by outreach activities. This network is part of a snowball effect as it refers migrants with problems as well as victims and survivors to HopeNow for relevant services. Building trust, capacity, skills, and knowledge are key components

to make the marginalised, stigmatised, and often vulnerable and criminalised individuals feel empowered enough to change their life course for the better or at the very least experience hope.

HopeNow is committed to developing improved methods in social work. One such approach employs a peer-group social worker with personal experience of being trafficked from Africa to Europe to cut down the socio-cultural distance between the practitioners and the target group. Together with a human-to-human approach HopeNow have experienced that this way of working facilitates a greater willingness among vulnerable groups to share their experiences. It may however take a long time for a person to share their story due to the many layers of trauma involved.

Throughout many years of work HopeNow has built strong relationships and a network based on trust, which enables HopeNow to keep a finger on the pulse of what is currently happening in an area which is known to be closed and secretive. Furthermore, it increases the ability to carry out research which reflects the hyper-complex, multi-dimensional and ever-changing nature of human trafficking.

Advocacy, media, and the role of survivors

HopeNow is rather often portrayed and interviewed by the daily media and other press. The organisation has also been involved in developing several documentary films as previously mentioned on aspects of human trafficking - with film maker Anja Dalhoff. Details about the documentaries can be found on the website of HopeNow. As part of the daily work, HopeNow share their expertise and knowledge by facilitating meetings, giving presentations, or through regular meetings with partner institutions and by meeting professionals, politicians, and survivors face to face. Sharing of knowledge is recognized as a priority by HopeNow and the organisation plan to be more available and relevant to the academic environment by developing working papers and participating in more conferences. Social media is another channel to be used more effectively.

The driving force behind human trafficking can be divided into socio-economic, political, and global forces, which are interrelated creating favourable conditions for traffickers to recruit, deceive, move, coerce, and exploit vulnerable human beings. It is also one of the largest enterprises in the world. The role of HopeNow in such a situation, and as a small but significant actor, is to raise awareness in society and empower the victims and survivors to increasingly make their voices heard. Thus, the organisation acknowledges its important role by sharing its expertise with all relevant actors in society and support policy and behavioural changes which, in turn, can disrupt the thriving industry of human trafficking.

HopeNow underlines that it is human beings with hopes, identities, strength, and weaknesses and with histories just like many of us, who become victims of the crime of trafficking. Thus, the human-to-human approach of the organisation recognises people falling prey to trafficking as victims, but that the individuals are much more than solely a victim. The philosophy of the organisation is to empower people to help themselves and others, through trust and confidence building, relationship building, knowledge sharing and the creation of environments that are conducive to learning, interacting, and growing.