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Denmark

Migrant women at risk

Each year 64,000 women in Denmark experience violence, around 60 per cent of them in their own homes. Dannerhuset is the oldest shelter for women in Denmark. Every year it helps more than 1,000 women. Some need advice and counselling, others urgently need a safe place to stay. All are fleeing violence and abuse, mostly at the hands of their husbands or partners.

Danish shelters like Dannerhuset are seeing a growing number of migrant women who need help. By 2005, 40 per cent of women in Danish shelters came from ethnic minority groups. Many of these women live in fear not only of violence at home, but also of forcible return to their country of origin. For some women, forcible return means returning to a country where they will face further abuse and persecution as divorced women.

Migrant women can only obtain Danish residency if they are married to a man with residency in Denmark; they are only eligible for residency in their own right after they have lived in the country for seven years. Danish immigration law exempts women fleeing a violent marriage from the seven-year requirement. In reality, however, most women who apply for residency in their own right after leaving an abusive marriage are turned down.

“Migrant women are encouraged to leave their violent husbands,” says Vibe Klarup Voetmann, Director of Dannerhuset, “but if they do, all they get is a single ticket home to the country they came from... Often they don’t get any help at all.”

UN committees monitoring discrimination against women and racial discrimination have expressed concern about the situation facing women who arrive in Denmark as part of family reunification procedures. They highlight the extreme difficulty such women face in obtaining residency.

“We wish we had a lawyer in Dannerhuset who could take on these cases and help them,” says Vibe Klarup Voetmann. “The next step is to change the Danish legislation.”

[Call to action]

Write to Dannerhuset, expressing your support for their work.

[Sample letter]

Dear staff and volunteers,

As part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, I am writing to express my support and admiration for your work.

Shelters like Dannerhuset provide invaluable help and support to women and children who have experienced violence. I would like to pay special tribute to the work that you have undertaken with disadvantaged groups, in particular with migrant women who have suffered domestic violence and are threatened with forcible return to their countries of origin.

Despite your limited resources you make a difference to the lives of the many women who turn to you for help and advice. I hope that in future your shelter will receive the respect, recognition and resources you need to continue and improve the support you provide for survivors of violence against women.

Amnesty International will continue to urge the Danish government to sufficiently support women's shelters and enable them to provide legal assistance for migrant women who face the dilemma of staying in a violent relationship or being forcibly returned to their countries of origin.

Yours sincerely,

[Target contact details]

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