

Experiences of Return and Reintegration

**Voices of returnees from
Denmark to Thailand**

February 2026 – Copenhagen, Denmark





DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

Contents

Summary (in Danish)	5
Background and purpose	8
Method, scope, and ethical considerations.....	9
Support system in Denmark	12
Context in brief	13
Experiences of return and reintegration	15
Profile of returnees 2020 – 2025.....	15
Profile of the 15 women interviewed	17
Motivations for travelling to Europe	17
Being a provider	18
Burdened by debt linked to exploitation.....	20
Starting a business	21
Counselling process in brief.....	24
Family-based businesses	25
Determination and pride.....	26
Stigma and silence	27
“I keep going”: a strategy of empowerment.....	28
Still on the move.....	29
Perspectives on the support provided.....	31
Conclusions and recommendations	33
Extract of DRC’s global policy on return	34
Thank you	35

Series on experiences of return and reintegration

This is the second publication in a new series by DRC Asylum, focusing on return and reintegration. The series aims to shed light on what it means to return, not through statistics or policy analysis, but through the personal stories of people who have returned from Denmark to different countries. The publications are not evaluations of specific reintegration programs or academic studies. Instead, the goal is simply to share first-hand insights into the return and reintegration process; insights that are personal, complex, and rarely heard in public debates. By presenting a diverse range of experiences, the series challenges simplified narratives of return as either success or failure and aims to broaden the discussion around return policies.

Summary (in Danish)

Denne rapport sætter fokus på de personlige erfaringer hos personer, der er vendt tilbage fra Danmark til Thailand med reintegrationsstøtte. Formålet er at give et indblik i deres oplevelser af tilbagevenden og reintegration og belyse processen gennem forskellige individuelle perspektiver.

Siden 2020 har DRC Dansk Flygtningehjælp (DRC) og Caritas Thailand (CT) samarbejdet om at yde reintegrationsstøtte til personer, der vender tilbage fra Danmark til Thailand. I perioden fra 2020 til midt december 2025 er i alt 61 personer udrejst til Thailand med støtte gennem samarbejdet. De er alle personer uden opholdstilladelse i Danmark.

Ud over løbende monitorering af alle individuelle reintegrationsforløb har DRC gennemført to besøg i Thailand siden programmets start; et i 2022 med møder med 12 tilbagevendte og et i 2025 med dybdegående interviews med 15 tilbagevendte. Rapporten bygger på DRC's samlede erfaringer med reintegrationsforløbene i samarbejde med CT, hvis faglige viden fra det daglige arbejde med rådgivning og støtte indgår i rapporten som et vigtigt grundlag. Det er imidlertid fortællingerne fra de 15 kvinder, der blev interviewet i maj 2025, som giver rapporten stemme og et konkret indblik i de levede erfaringer med tilbagevenden og reintegration.

Profil af tilbagevendte 2020–2025

I alt er 61 personer – *alle kvinder* – udrejst til Thailand fra Danmark med støtte fra reintegrationsprogrammet faciliteret af CT. Størstedelen af kvinderne (54 ud af 61) blev i Danmark identificeret som personer udsat for menneskehandel, primært seksuel udnyttelse, mens syv var afviste asylansøgere. Der er således *ikke* tale om personer, der er omfattet af repatrieringsloven, idet disse udgør en anden målgruppe, som denne rapport ikke adresserer.

De 61 kvinder havde en gennemsnitsalder på 39,5 år (ved udrejsen) og var mellem 22 og 54 år. Geografisk kom de fra flere regioner i Thailand, særligt den nordøstlige Isan-region (43 %) og den centrale region, herunder Bangkok (26 %).

Reintegrationsprojekter 2020–2025

Hver enkelt tilbagevendt kvinde modtog et individuelt tilpasset reintegrationsforløb samt in-kind støtte til at bruge på relevante aktiviteter. Reintegrationsstøtten blev af de tilbagevendte primært anvendt til at etablere små virksomheder.

I alt er der i perioden blevet oprettet 59 mindre virksomheder, som overordnet kan inddeles i fire kategorier: mindre fødevareraktiviteter (som eks. små restauranter og

streetfood-boder), skønheds- og wellnessydelser, landbrugsaktiviteter samt detailhandel. Omkring 45–50 af disse virksomheder vurderes af CT fortsat at være i drift, men i nogle tilfælde videreført af pårørende/familie. De øvrige virksomheder er ikke længere aktive.

Reintegrationsprogrammet omfatter også mulighed for, at mindreårige børn i Thailand af tilbagevendte personer, som har været udsat for menneskehandel, modtager støtte. I perioden 2020–2025 har i alt 40 børn været omfattet af tilbuddet (gennemsnitsalder: 10,5 år). Støtten til børnene er primært blevet anvendt til at dække skoleudgifter – herunder undervisning, skolemateriale, transport og skolemåltider – samt til basale fornødenheder som senge, legetøj og cykler.

Profil af de 15 interviewede kvinder

Tretten af kvinderne var identificeret som personer udsat for menneskehandel, mens to var afviste asylansøgere. Deres alder spændte fra 28 til 48 år (ved udrejsen) med en gennemsnitsalder på 38 år. Ni af kvinderne havde opholdt sig i Danmark i under seks måneder, mens andre havde tilbragt flere år enten i Danmark eller i andre europæiske lande. Ni af kvinderne var mødre, men udover egne børn forsørgede de fleste (12) også andre familiemedlemmer. Fire af de interviewede kvinder havde børn under 18 år, som også var omfattet af programmet.

Alle 15 kvinder brugte dele af deres reintegrationsmidler på at starte små virksomheder, mens resten gik til blandt andet bolig, sundhed og transport. De 15 virksomheder afspejler de generelle mønstre blandt de 59 projekter, der blev gennemført i perioden 2020–2025: To detailbutikker (tøjbutik og dagligvarebutik), fem landbrugsaktiviteter (herunder fx kvæg-og andeopdræt, durian-plantage, blandet landbrug), fire skønheds-/massagesaloner og fire madvirksomheder (street-food, små restauranter).

Det tog i gennemsnit cirka 2,5 måneder fra kvindernes ankomst til Thailand, til deres reintegrationsplan var udarbejdet og godkendt af Hjemrejsestyrelsen. Herefter kunne aktiviteterne sættes i gang.

Ønske om økonomisk stabilitet og rollen som forsørger

De 15 tilbagevendte kvinder angav enslydende årsager til, at de oprindeligt forlod Thailand for at rejse til Danmark eller andre europæiske lande. Den overordnede motivation

var ønsket om at tjene penge og forbedre deres egne og familiens levevilkår. De fleste havde gæld, og følelsen af ansvar overfor familien og rollen som forsørger fremstod som helt centrale drivkræfter. For kvinderne var beslutningen om at rejse ud af Thailand således tæt forbundet med håbet om at opnå større økonomisk stabilitet og at kunne støtte deres børn og øvrige familiemedlemmer økonomisk.

Efter tilbagevenden til Thailand prægede disse forventninger fortsat kvindernes oplevelser. For nogle, som havde formålet at skabe bedre vilkår for deres familier, blev svaret – om ikke andet på sigt – oplevet som meningsfuldt. For andre blev svaret derimod oplevet som en byrde og som en kilde til skyldfølelse, især hvis de ikke havde formålet at tjene de forventede penge under opholdet i Danmark. Nogle beskrev et pres fra familien og skuffelse over egne begrænsede indtjeningsmuligheder.

Samtidig var der betydelige forskelle mellem kvinderne. Nogle, særligt yngre kvinder med fortsatte store økonomiske forpligtelser, beskrev en hverdag præget af usikkerhed. Andre, ofte lidt ældre kvinder med mere stabile livsvilkår, oplevede, at den mest turbulente periode lå bag dem og beskrev deres livssituation som mere rolig og afklaret.

Tynget af gæld

En stor del af kvinderne (12 ud af 15) havde eller havde haft betydelig gæld, enten fra deres ophold i Danmark/Europa eller fra lån i Thailand, som ofte blev taget for at finansiere rejsen til Europa. Gælden var tæt forbundet med udnyttelse, herunder krav om betaling til bagmænd, og flere kvinder havde desuden lån fra uformelle kreditorer med meget høje og ulovlige renter. Flere kvinder fortalte, at de i Danmark måtte arbejde under konstant pres i udnyttelsesforhold for at tilbagebetale gælden, som var pålagt dem.

Efter tilbagevenden til Thailand fortsatte gælden og de tidligere oplevelser af udnyttelse med at præge kvindernes liv. Nogle af kvinderne følte sig utrygge efter ankomsten, fordi de frygtede, at bagmænd eller lånehajere ville opsøge dem. Med tiden begyndte de dog gradvist at føle sig mere trygge, efterhånden som de oplevede, at de ikke blev kontaktet. Samtidig blev ansvaret for familiens økonomi og ønsket om at kunne tilbagebetale gælden dog fortsat oplevet som en byrde.

Etablering af virksomhed og familieinvolvering

Flere af de projekter, kvinderne etablerede med støtte fra reintegrationsmidlerne, byggede videre på enten deres egne eller familiens allerede eksisterende kompetencer og erfaringer. Én kvinde investerede f.eks. i salg af nudler – en branche, som hun allerede havde erfaring med. Andre udvidede eksisterende familielandbrug.

Ikke alle investeringer var succesfulde; enkelte projekter, som grise- og rotteavl, mislykkedes på længere sigt. Andre justerede deres projekter undervejs for at opnå bedre indtjening, f.eks. en kvinde, der skiftede fra salg af nudler

til salg af crepes (pandekager) efter rådgivning fra CT.

Af de 15 projekter blev omkring halvdelen drevet sammen med familiemedlemmer, mens den anden halvdel blev administreret selvstændigt af kvinderne. Otte projekter involverede enten fuld familiedrift eller støtte fra familien, herunder alle seks landbrugsprojekter, hvor jord og ejendom tilhørte familien. Derudover deltog familiemedlemmer i driften af enkelte mad- og tøjbutikker.

Nogle projekter blev oprindeligt startet som fælles familieprojekter, men blev senere fuldt overtaget af familiemedlemmer. Dette gjaldt f.eks. en durian-plantage, hvor kvinden først deltog i det daglige arbejde, men senere flyttede til en nærliggende by og kun besøgte familien lejlighedsvis. Al indkomst fra plantagen går dermed til hendes forældre, men det betyder til gengæld, at det er muligt for hende at beholde mere af egen indkomst fra arbejde i byen. I alt er seks af de 15 projekter blevet overladt til familiemedlemmer, enten fordi kvinderne har forladt Thailand (3) eller er flyttet fra området, hvor projektet blev etableret (3).

Selvom reintegrationsstøtten formelt er målrettet den enkelte individuelle tilbagevendte, formes den i praksis af det familiefællesskab, som kvinden indgår i, og det påvirker selvfølgelig, hvordan kvinderne tilgår og anvender støtten. For kvinderne er deres egne ønsker og behov tæt forbundet med deres families, og de kan sjældent adskilles fra det ansvar og de forpligtelser, de har og føler overfor familien.

Handlekraft og stolthed

Flere af kvinderne gav udtryk for stolthed over, hvad de – på trods af vanskelige omstændigheder – har formået at opnå efter tilbagevenden. For nogle udsprang stoltheden af, at de havde kunnet skabe bedre vilkår for deres familie eller leve op til familiens forventninger om at bidrage økonomisk.

Flere fremhævede en følelse af styrket selvopfattelse gennem de virksomheder og initiativer, de havde etableret. Udover at have fået en øget indtægtskilde havde det også givet dem en følelse af øget handlekraft og selvstændighed. En kvinde beskrev, at hun efter tilbagevenden havde etableret en massagesalon, som siden er vokset og nu beskæftiger fire personer. Hun fremhævede, at det at være sin egen chef gav hende både uafhængighed og ejerskab over sit arbejde, og hun udtrykte stor stolthed over det, hun havde skabt.

En anden kvinde, der havde brugt sin reintegrationsstøtte på uddannelse og udstyr til en mobil neglesalon beskrev, hvordan hun i dag havde langt større forventninger til sit liv, og at det havde udvidet hendes forestilling om, hvad der var muligt for hendes fremtid.

Stigma og tavshed

Selv om mange af kvinderne udviste betydelig handlekraft efter deres tilbagevenden til Thailand, kæmpede de samtidig med sårbarhed og psykisk belastning efter deres oplevelser. For størstedelen var den følelsesmæssige påvirkning stadig tydelig.

Flere kvinder beskrev, hvordan minderne fra tiden i Danmark fyldte i hverdagen, særligt når de var alene. Nogle fortalte, at de kæmpede med depression, og i et enkelt tilfælde selvmordstanker, ofte udløst af gæld, pres fra lånehajer eller følelsen af at være vendt tilbage til Thailand uden at have opnået det forventede økonomiske resultat.

Mange af kvinderne valgte ikke at fortælle familie eller venner, hvad de havde oplevet i Danmark. Flere skabte i stedet dækhistorier for at undgå stigmatisering og fordommelse, og fordi de ikke ønskede at tale om de svære oplevelser. For mange fungerede denne tavshed som en coping-strategi – en måde at fastholde fokus på nutiden og fremtiden og at positionere sig som kvinder, der tager ansvar for sig selv og deres familier. Kvinderne orienterede sig primært mod at komme videre og skabe stabilitet.

Flere understregede sammenhængen mellem økonomisk stabilitet og psykisk velbefindende. Evnen til at tjene penge og forsørge familien styrkede deres handlekraft og gjorde det muligt at have fokus på hverdagen frem for fortiden.

Stadig på vej videre

For nogle kvinder betød det fremadrettede fokus også fysisk bevægelse. Flere fortsatte med at rejse eller flytte, enten midlertidigt eller permanent, som led i at skabe nye muligheder for sig selv og deres familier. Blandt de 15 interviewede kvinder havde tre igen forladt Thailand, mens yderligere tre var flyttet internt i landet væk fra området, hvor deres reintegrationsprojekt var etableret. Enkelte kvinder udtrykte et ønske om at forlade Thailand igen, mens andre ønskede at blive og etablere en stabil tilværelse.

Fem af de interviewede havde partnere i/fra udlandet; nogle med partner bosat i Thailand, andre i langdistanceforhold, og enkelte var flyttet til partnerens land.

På et overordnet plan vurderede CT, at cirka halvdelen af de 61 kvinder, som har deltaget i programmet siden 2020, har forladt Thailand igen, ofte motiveret af behovet for at tjene penge.

Reintegration er en kompleks og kontinuerlig proces, der rækker langt ud over den støtte, reintegrationsprogrammet kan tilbyde. Programmet giver dog væsentlig støtte og konkrete ressourcer, som gør det muligt for tilbagevendte at etablere indkomstsikre projekter, styrke deres handlekraft og for nogle skabe en vis stabilitet. Gennem stemmerne fra de 15 tilbagevendte kvinder kommer rap-

porten tæt på de levede erfaringer og giver et konkret indblik i, hvordan tilbagevenden og reintegration opleves i praksis.

Background and purpose

This report aims to bring forward and give voice to the personal experiences of persons returning from Denmark to Thailand. Its purpose is to share valuable insights into the complexities of return and reintegration processes through the personal perspectives of returnees.

Since 2020, DRC Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Caritas Thailand (CT) have cooperated providing reintegration assistance to persons returning from Denmark. Throughout the years a total of 61 individuals – all women without a residence permit in Denmark – have returned to Thailand with assistance through this collaboration. Among the 61, seven women were rejected asylum seekers, while the majority, 54 women, were identified in Denmark as having been subjected to human trafficking. In addition, a total of 40 children of the returnees have also benefitted from the support.

The content of this report draws on DRC’s accumulated experience working with this group, in collaboration with CT, over the past several years. However, the report is shaped first and foremost by the *voices of 15 women* who were interviewed during DRC’s most recent visit to Thailand in May 2025. These women, all of whom returned from Denmark with reintegration support, form the core of the report and their stories give voice to the lived experiences of return and reintegration processes from Denmark to Thailand.

The narratives of these women challenge the idea of reintegration as a straightforward, linear process of “going home” to settle permanently. Their stories also challenge the Danish model of *individualized* reintegration support, which is designed to target the specific, individual needs of the person. The women’s wishes and needs are instead deeply intertwined with those of their children, parents, and extended families, and it is reflected in the way they activate and navigate the support available for them. Alongside severe vulnerabilities, their stories also reveal a strong sense of agency and determination – a drive to earn money, make a living, support their families and fulfill their responsibilities within their families.

About DRC Asylum asyl.drc.ngo

Since the early 1980s, DRC has been offering legal counselling to asylum seekers in Denmark at all stages of the asylum process, including support after a final rejection. Since 2004, return and reintegration projects have been an integral part of DRC’s work in Denmark, and since 2014, DRC has with funding from the Danish authorities consistently provided impartial, non-directive return and reintegration counselling to a wide range of rejected asylum seekers in Denmark¹.

DRC is also an active member of the European Reintegration Support Organizations (ERSO) network – a network of European NGOs with partnerships in over 30 countries worldwide through which reintegration counselling and support are made available. DRC Asylum has, in cooperation with local reintegration partners, made reintegration programs available since 2018 and been involved in more than 300 individual reintegration processes. Through counselling service in Denmark, close cooperation with local partners, virtual follow-up with returnees and in-country visits to both reintegration partners and returnees, DRC has gained significant experience in return and reintegration processes.

In 2020, DRC expanded the target group for its reintegration programs to also include individuals identified by the Danish authorities as having been subjected to human trafficking. This development was the beginning of the collaboration with Caritas Thailand, which now provides reintegration support to both rejected asylum seekers and persons subjected to human trafficking returning from Denmark to Thailand. For the latter group, the Center against Human Trafficking (CMM) is responsible for providing specialized counselling and assistance prior to return.

¹ For more information on DRC’s approach to return and reintegration counselling, please refer to: “DRC Return Counselling Methodology Brief. Return Counselling in a European Asylum Context. The Methodology employed by DRC when counselling rejected asylum seekers in Denmark about return”, August 2021. https://asyl.drc.ngo/media/jixhgocq/drc_return_couns_booklet.pdf.

Method, scope, and ethical considerations

The content presented in this publication draws on DRC's experience providing reintegration support in collaboration with CT since 2020. The support was given to persons returning from Denmark to Thailand – either as rejected asylum seekers or as persons subjected to human trafficking.

In addition to monitoring individual reintegration processes, DRC has conducted two field visits to Thailand since the launch of the program. The first visit took place in 2022 and included meetings with 12 returnees – 10 individuals subjected to human trafficking and two rejected asylum seekers. The second visit, in May 2025, focused solely on deepening DRC's understanding of the reintegration experiences of Thai women returning from Denmark, with in-depth interviews conducted with 15 women to inform this report.

The findings presented in this report are thus primarily based on *in-depth, individual qualitative interviews with 15 women*. These insights are further informed by the expertise and practical experience of CT. During the 2025 field visit, DRC held a workshop with the CT counselling team to gather key observations, reflections, and recommendations aimed at strengthening DRC's understanding of the return and reintegration experiences of individuals returning from Denmark. Additional insights were also shared informally by CT staff throughout the visit.

Qualitative interviews

The 15 qualitative interviews were conducted in Thailand between May 15–21, 2025. Caritas Thailand supported the coordination of the visit, facilitated contact with returnees, and provided interpretation where needed.

Interviews took place in various settings: at businesses established with reintegration support (4), at the women's homes (2), at the CT office in Bangkok (2), at a hotel (1) and at a nearby restaurant (1). Five interviews were conducted online due to distance – two with women living in Southern Thailand and three with women residing in Denmark, Germany, and Saudi Arabia.

Before each interview, a preparatory session was held with CT to align key case details, sensitivities, and the most appropriate interview approach. Following each interview, informal reflections were shared within the team to reflect on the process, assess the interaction, and discuss impressions of the returnee's situation and responses.

Regarding the selection of participants, CT made efforts to contact *all* returnees prior to our visit (a total of 54 women at that time) to invite them to take part in the interviews. Less than half could be reached, as many had either changed their phone numbers or did not respond². Some explicitly declined to take part. Among those who were reached and declined, one woman explained that she is now married to a Thai national, integrated into his family, and does not wish to revisit her past. This reluctance to speak about previous experiences was a common reason for declining to participate in the interviews.

Even though the purpose of the interviews was not to evaluate the success of individual projects, it could have been the case that some women also declined to participate because their reintegration project had not been successful. It was, at least initially, our impression that a few of the participating women in the start of our meetings seemed slightly anxious, expecting their personal success to be assessed though this was not the case.

Furthermore, CT estimated that approximately half of the women who had participated in the program since 2020 may have left Thailand again, either on a temporary or long-term basis primarily because the income they could earn in Thailand was insufficient to cover basic living costs and repay debts.

² CT is not expected to maintain contact with the returnees after the reintegration period ends. The program runs for 12 months after arrival.

Interview guide

A comprehensive interview guide was developed prior to the visit and reviewed by key stakeholders, including the Danish Return Agency and the Center Against Human Trafficking. The guide was designed to cover a broad range of relevant topics, while allowing flexibility to adapt to each conversation. It served as a reference rather than a strict script. All interviews were semi-structured and conducted in an informal atmosphere.

The interview questions focused on how the individual returnee subjectively experienced the return and reintegration process, based on their own reflections. The questions also assessed the sustainability of reintegration through three interrelated key dimensions: economic, social, and psychosocial embeddedness³.

Economic embeddedness includes factors like income, opportunities for self-sufficiency, and housing conditions. *Social embeddedness* covers social networks, relationships, and the re-establishment of previous connections. *Psychosocial embeddedness* refers to the returnees' sense of belonging, autonomy, agency, and overall well-being.

A limited perspective on a complex process

The interview framework was informed by the concept of (mixed) embeddedness rather than reintegration, drawing on insights from previous research/reports⁴. Whereas reintegration suggests a return to a prior state of belonging, an embeddedness-approach acknowledges that the process might not be one of reintegration with an *end* goal but rather a continuous process of embedding into an ever-changing, dynamic context.

Returnees often have changed identities and positions, and the country they return to presents a new reality, with social relations, political structures, and economic conditions having shifted. Reintegration, then, is not simply about individual adaptation but is shaped by broader structural conditions and experiences across the entire migration cycle. Sustainable reintegration cannot be reduced to achieving economic self-sufficiency or avoiding re-migration. It involves complex interactions between economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions, influenced by returnees' experiences before, during, and after migration⁵.

Thus, it is important to note that the available reintegration program, though valuable, cannot ensure long-term sustainability. This report does not aim to evaluate or measure the success of a specific reintegration program or claim to provide a comprehensive picture. Instead, it offers a limited snapshot—insights drawn from a small number of returnees from Denmark to Thailand—while recognizing that a fuller understanding requires the inclusion of wider perspectives and contextual factors.

Anonymity and informed consent

All participants in this report have been anonymized, with names and certain personal details changed to protect their identities. Each participant provided informed consent for both their participation and the use of their experiences in the report.

While some women preferred complete anonymity, others were comfortable being identified by name and did not express concerns about being recognized. Some participants gave explicit consent to be photographed and visually identified. In all cases, however, personal information such as names, and in some instances also locations, has been anonymized throughout this report.

³ The approach – and interview framework applied – were developed with inspiration from Delmi's 2021 report "*Those who were sent back. Return and Reintegration of rejected asylum seekers to Afghanistan and Iraq*". 2021:10. Delmi. <https://www.delmi.se/media/bikexkgo/delmi-report-on-return-and-reintegration.pdf>

⁴ See for instance: Ruben et al. (2009) "*What Determines the Embeddedness of Forced-Return Migrants? Rethinking the Role of Pre- and Post-Return Assistance*" in IMR Volume 43 Number 4 (Winter 2009) (<https://asyl.drc.ngo/media/x2nbthph/evaluation-of-the-kosovo-programme.pdf>) & in "*Those who were sent back. Return and Reintegration of rejected asylum seekers to Afghanistan and Iraq*" 2021:10, p. 21-23 Delmi. <https://www.delmi.se/media/bikexkgo/delmi-report-on-return-and-reintegration.pdf>

⁵ cf. Black et al. 2004; van Houte & Davids 2008; Ruben et al. 2009; Paasche 2016; Koser & Kuschminder 2015; Kuschminder 2017; Strand et al 2016; IOM 2015; OECD 2020 in "*Those who were sent back. Return and Reintegration of rejected asylum seekers to Afghanistan and Iraq*". 2021:10, p. 9. Delmi. & "*Long-term Sustainability of Return of Rejected Asylum Seekers to Kosovo. Evaluation of the Kosovo Return Programme implemented by Danish Refugee Council 2006-2009*". April 2011, p. 5. DRC

Caritas Thailand*caritasthailand.net*

Founded in 1972, Caritas Thailand is the social action body of the Catholic Church in Thailand, operating under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand. Its mission is to support vulnerable populations by promoting human dignity, strengthening families and communities, and protecting human life and the environment. Key focus areas include community empowerment, emergency response, support to migrants and refugees, care for persons with disabilities, human rights advocacy, anti-human trafficking, and environmental sustainability.

The national secretariat in Bangkok coordinates a network of 11 diocesan offices, with over 120 staff and around 500 volunteers across the country. Their services for returnees from Denmark cover the full reintegration process, from airport pick-up to long-term support (12 months), including vocational training and business development programs.

Ethical considerations and limitations

During the visits and interviews, numerous ethical dilemmas emerged.

Many of the women's families were unaware of the women's experiences in Denmark, including the circumstances that led to their identification as persons subjected to human trafficking. Although the purpose of the interviews was not to focus on exploitation or trauma, the issues remained present.

Our visit to Saijai, a woman who returned to Thailand from Denmark in early 2023, highlights some of the complexities of engaging in conversations about sensitive and potentially stigmatizing topics. We met Saijai in a small rural village at her family's farm in the mountains. She welcomed us together with her mother, who manages most of the daily work on the farm. They showed us around the land, including the durian trees planted with support from the reintegration program. During the visit, we were mindful of what could be said. Certain topics could not be addressed with Saijai's mother nearby as she wasn't aware of all that had happened during Saijai's time in Denmark or the details surrounding her return. In the presence of Saijai's mother, we talked about the farm, the decision to invest in durian trees, the harvest, and the income it brought. At one point, to give us a moment of privacy, CT colleagues suggested a short walk with Saijai's mother to see more of the land, allowing us space for a more open conversation with Saijai.

CT's seemingly simple gesture of suggesting a walk to see more of the land underscores the many small, yet critical strategies required to ensure that ethical boundaries are respected and that participants are not put at risk – emotionally or socially – through their participation. We had discussed our approach and roles prior to the visit to Saijai and we knew from CT what a sensitive setting it potentially was.

DRC works based on the principle of "do no harm". Conducting the interviews, we aimed to ensure that topics and questions were formulated with respect and sensitivity towards the women's feelings and well-being. We recognize that participation could trigger unpleasant or traumatic experiences. To address this, we emphasized that participation was voluntary and made it clear that there was no obligation to discuss specific topics.

All interviews were carried out by DRC staff, and they took place in the presence of CT staff who also assisted with interpretation when relevant. Furthermore, CT had supported contacting the returnees and organizing the logistics of the interviews and visits. This setup had certain advantages, as the women appeared to have a close and trusting relationship with their counsellor from CT. It also made us able to prepare better as we were made aware of potential vulnerabilities and sensitive contexts ahead of the meetings. However, it also presented challenges in obtaining open and honest responses from the women. Neither DRC nor CT can be considered independent, given our respective roles in providing support to the women. CT may have had an interest in presenting a positive picture of the reintegration program, and similarly, some of the women may have wished to appear successful. Disclosing vulnerabilities could be difficult, especially in light of both of our mandates and involvement in the reintegration program.

Although efforts were made prior to the visit to ensure that the women understood that their participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, we recognize that some may have perceived the visit as a form of assessment or check-up on their reintegration projects. To counter this, we explicitly addressed the purpose of the visit at the start of each interview, stressing that their participation was completely optional and that the interviews were not an assessment of their success or performance.

Finally, children were not included. Although their inclusion could have been relevant, it would have required different methods and resources beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, although many children benefited from support, they were not part of the return process itself, as they remained in Thailand throughout the period.

Terminology

In this report, the women are referred to as persons subjected to trafficking with the exception of a small number who were not formally identified as such but accessed the program as rejected asylum seekers. What most of the women shared was that they had been officially recognized by the Danish authorities as “*victims of human trafficking*”.

Terms used in the report such as *victim*, *survivor*, *sex work*, *sexual exploitation*, are used with care, acknowledging their different connotations and limitations. The women’s experiences and self-identifications are diverse, and these terms cannot fully capture the complexity of their realities. Importantly, references to sex work in this report do not imply voluntary engagement or regulated employment. Rather, it should be understood as exploitation without labor rights or protection. In particular, when the women refer to massage clinics in Denmark, they are describing contexts of unregulated sex work. In contrast, references in the report to massage clinics and massage work in Thailand describe legitimate beauty and massage businesses (not offering sexual services), some of which were established by the women with their reintegration support.

Support system in Denmark

Return is often described as either voluntary or forced, but it is often in reality a grey area in between. For rejected asylum seekers as well as persons subjected to human trafficking, the decision to return is usually initiated by the authorities’ return decision and the risk of forced deportation. Thus, the decision is seldom made voluntarily, but rather due to lack of alternative legal options.

Being aware that returnees within this context then rather accept than voluntarily consent to return, DRC in the European context operates with the term *accepted return*. This refers to individuals who agree to return but whose decision may have been influenced by a legal order or the threat of possible sanctions.

The Danish authorities provide two different reintegration support packages for, respectively, rejected asylum seekers and individuals subjected to human trafficking. Eligibility for reintegration support is limited to persons who fall within the category of *voluntary* – or what DRC would term *accepted* – return.

The Danish Return Agency assesses whether the person is cooperating and complying with the return decision and determines if the applicant meets the conditions for receiving support. The specific eligibility requirements differ between the two categories—rejected asylum seekers and persons subjected to human trafficking—but in both cases, access to support requires that the return is assessed as voluntary (*accepted*) and on the individual actively participating in the process.

For persons subjected to human trafficking, the support package includes up to 40,000 DKK of *in-kind* assistance, combined with 10,000 DKK in cash support. “In-kind” support means that it is provided through services and assistance, rather than cash. If the returnee has minor children, additional cash support (10,000 DKK) is provided, along with in-kind assistance for each child under 18 years (up to 9,000 DKK). For rejected asylum seekers, the scope of the support package is more limited, with no cash component and in-kind assistance of up to 20,000 DKK⁶.

⁶ For asylum seekers who received a rejection in their asylum case and have cooperated with a return decision continuously, it is possible to receive a cash component of 4815 kr. from the 1 April 2025. Bekendtgørelse om hjemrejsestøtte m.v.: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2025/286>

Most of the support is thus offered in-kind and is managed by local reintegration partners in the country of return. The support is tailored to the individual's needs and can be used for a range of purposes, including temporary accommodation, employment assistance, income-generating activities, business development, healthcare, and housing improvements etc. The local reintegration partner oversees the returnee's development for up to 12 months following their departure from Denmark.

The available reintegration support, though valuable, cannot necessarily ensure long-term sustainability given the complexity of the reintegration process in all its aspects. For one thing, a process of reintegration begins long before departure and a good basis for starting a reintegration process is feeling motivated and prepared – not pressured to return⁷. These programs thus represent an initial step in a reintegration journey, offering support but without necessarily fully ensuring comprehensive reintegration.

Context in brief

Just as this report does not claim to provide a comprehensive picture of return and reintegration processes in Thailand, neither does it aim to offer detailed information on the situation in Thailand. The intention of the report is solely to offer insights into the personal experiences of returnees. However, these personal experiences must of course be understood against the backdrop of Thailand's broader context.

The Kingdom of Thailand has a population of approximately 71 million people⁸, the majority of whom are ethnically Thai and practice Buddhism. The country is a constitutional monarchy led by King Vajiralongkorn and Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra⁹. Despite a summer (2025) marked by political unrest and border tensions with Cambodia, the overall security situation in Thailand remains relatively stable¹⁰.

Thailand is one of Southeast Asia's largest economies, driven by a strong tourism sector, electronics and automobile manufacturing, and agriculture. The unemployment rate remains low, reflecting a generally robust labor market¹¹. However, Thailand faces significant structural challenges. Income inequality is among the highest in the world, with wealth concentrated on the hands of a small elite. Corruption is widespread, and the informal economy plays a substantial role in the country's economy¹². Compared to neighboring countries, poverty levels in Thailand are relatively low¹³.

For persons subjected to human trafficking returning to Thailand, the reintegration support they receive can initially cover many expenses due to the relatively low cost of living compared to many other countries¹⁴. Income from wages or small-scale business activities is, however, often limited, reflecting the broader economic realities¹⁵.

⁷ See for instance DRC, June 2025 "Experiences of return and reintegration: Voices of returnees from Denmark to Iraq", section 'Prepared to return – practical and psychological barriers', pp. 13–16.

⁸ The World Bank's open data Portal. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/thailand>. Accessed on 11 December 2025.

⁹ Thailand, Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Thailand>. Accessed on 11 December 2025.

¹⁰ The Guardian, 9 December 2025 "Why has ceasefire collapsed between Thailand and Cambodia?"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/24/why-thailand-cambodia-border-clash-conflict>.

UNCHR, July 2025 "Türkiye welcomes Cambodia-Thailand ceasefire, calls for full respect and confidence-building measures"

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/turk-welcomes-cambodia-thailand-ceasefire-calls-full-respect-and-confidence>. Accessed on 11 December 2025.

Udenrigsministeriets rejsevejledning "Thailand": <https://um.dk/rejse-og-ophold/rejse-til-udlandet/rejsevejledninger/thailand>. Accessed on 11 December 2025.

¹¹ International Monetary Fund, February 2025 "Thailand: 2024 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Thailand"

¹² The World Bank, October 2024 "Poverty & Equity Brief, THAILAND"

documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099011301032557829/pdf/IDU-09dd9f07-68ca-4f43-87c5-c1b4891ebff1.pdf.

Transparency International, 2025 "Corruption Perceptions Index": <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/thailand>.

¹³ UNDP, 2025 "Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024 - Briefing note for countries on the 2024 Multidimensional Poverty Index"

<https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI2024/THA.pdf>.

¹⁴ World Bank, 2021 "International Comparison Program, GDP price level index and PPP-based GDP per capita index by economy, 2021"

¹⁵ International Monetary Fund, February 2025 "Thailand: 2024 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Thailand" <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/cr/issues/2025/02/20/thailand-2024-article-iv-consultation-press-release-staff-report-and-statement-by-the-562284>.

The number of asylum seekers from Thailand to the EU is very low. Over the past decade, an annual average of 44 Thai nationals have applied for asylum in the whole of EU, with Denmark receiving an average of just two applications annually¹⁶.

Across Europe, an average of 7,600 individuals have been identified as trafficked each year over the past decade. Approximately half of these cases involve sexual exploitation¹⁷.

In Denmark, the Center Against Human Trafficking (CMM) and the Danish Immigration Service assess whether an individual can be identified as a person subjected to human trafficking. Over the past 10 years, Denmark has identified an average of 87 trafficked persons annually. Between 10–15% of these have been from Thailand. In recent years, the number of Thai women identified as trafficked has increased, placing Thailand alongside Nigeria as one of the most common countries of origin for trafficked people in Denmark. The most recent statistics from 2025 suggest Thailand continues to be the most prevalent nationality in trafficking in Denmark¹⁸.

¹⁶ Eurostat, September 2025 "Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data"

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza_custom_17263054/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=e3b41dc8-b123-427c-8ffe-550c5f948273&c=1750872022999. Data extracted on the 08.09.2025

¹⁷ UN Network on Migration in Thailand, 2024 "Thailand Migration Report 2024"

<https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Thailand%20Migration%20Report%202024-revised2025.pdf>.

¹⁸ Center Mod Menneskehandel, Marts 2025 "Statistik 2024 Menneskehandel i Danmark"

<https://www.cmm.dk/Media/638769423755666405/Statistik%202024.%20Menneskehandel%20i%20Danmark.pdf>

Center Mod Menneskehandel, Årsstatistik 2011-2024: <https://www.cmm.dk/statistik/aarsstatistik-2011-2024>

Center Mod Menneskehandel, september 2025 "Halvårsstatistik Menneskehandel i Danmark": <https://www.cmm.dk/statistik/halvaarsstatistik-2025?Halv%C3%A5rsstatistik%202025>.

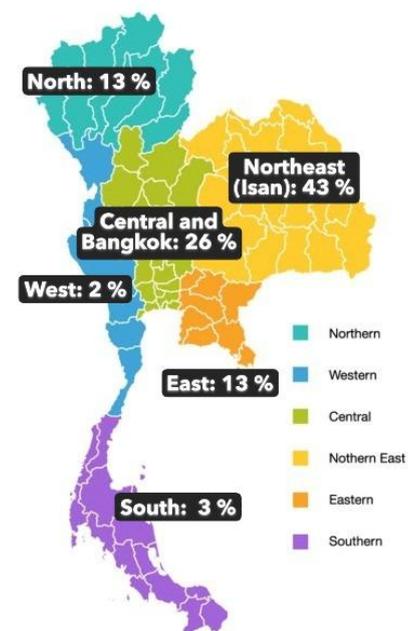
Experiences of return and reintegration

Profile of returnees 2020 – 2025

Since 2020, a total of 61 persons have returned to Thailand from Denmark with assistance from the reintegration program facilitated by Caritas Thailand. All of the returnees were women.

The majority (54 women) were identified by the Danish authorities as having been subjected to human trafficking, most of them had experienced exploitation in sex work. The remaining returnees were not identified as persons subjected to human trafficking but were rejected asylum seekers (seven women). In addition, a total of 40 children of the returnees have also benefitted from the support¹⁹.

At the time of their return, the women were on average 39,5 years old. The youngest was 22 years old, and the oldest was 54.



The returnees came from all over Thailand, but a large part (43 %) came from the rural Northeastern region of Isan, while many (26 %) came from the central region, including Bangkok.

Reintegration projects 2020-2025

After return, the returnees must, in collaboration with and with guidance from CT, develop a reintegration plan describing how their available in-kind support will be used.

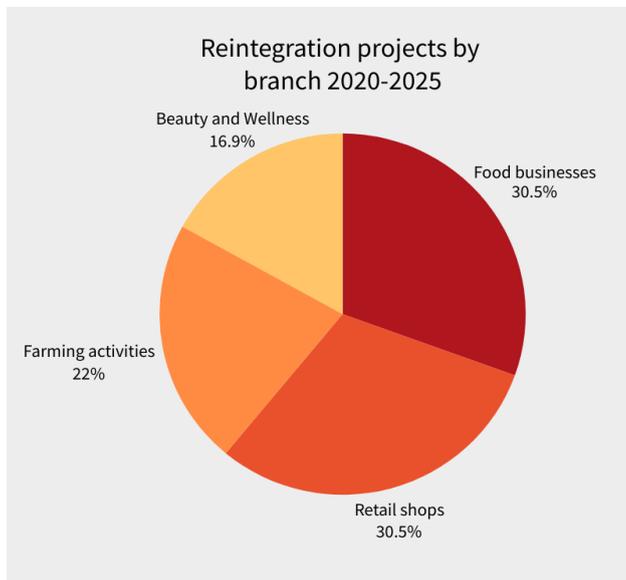
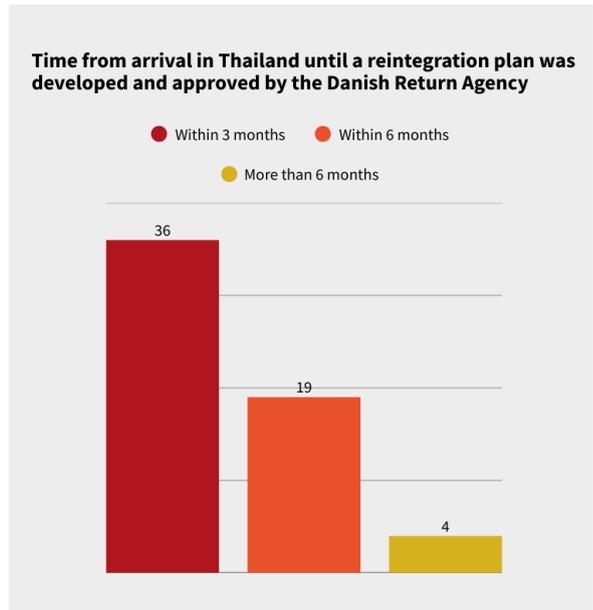
Before implementation, the plan must be approved by the Danish Return Agency with the aim of ensuring that the plan supports sustainable activities.

¹⁹ Data for 2025 have been collected and reported as of 1 December, 2025.

On average, it took approximately three months from arrival in Thailand until the women’s reintegration plans were developed and approved by the Danish Return Agency after which activities could be implemented.

The 59 reintegration projects²⁰ implemented between 2020 and 2025 can be grouped into four broad categories:

- Food businesses such as restaurants, cafés, and street food stalls.
- Beauty and wellness services – including manicure, massage, and hairdressing salons.
- Farming activities – ranging from rice and vegetable cultivation to fruit farming and livestock.
- Retail shops – selling clothing or other goods.



The diagram highlights the different areas of work where the returnees started a business²¹. Selling food or other items was the most prevalent source of income, while farming and beauty/wellness were other typical sources of income.

The support funds can also be used for activities other than starting a business, but in Thailand the majority of the funds are typically invested in establishing a business or other livelihood activity.

Of all the businesses established through the program, CT estimates that approximately 45–50 of the businesses remain operational. In some cases, these businesses are now maintained by relatives rather than the returnees themselves.

Children of returnees

A total of 40 children of the returnees also benefitted from reintegration support. Children (under 18 years) – of adults identified in Denmark as having been subjected to human trafficking – are also eligible for assistance, provided that the parent–child relationship can be documented. Accordingly, returnees with children in Thailand received in-kind support for both themselves and their children, with assistance of up to 9,000 DKK per child.

The 40 children who received support ranged in age from 1 to 17 years, with an average age of 11.5 years. The vast majority of the children’s support was allocated to school-related expenses (tuition fees, equipment, transport, uniforms, school meals, computers, etc.). Beyond educational costs, the support was also used for basic items such as beds, toys, and bicycles.

²⁰ At the report deadline, 59 reintegration projects had been approved by the Danish authorities.

²¹ In some cases, the returnees used their support to start more than one type of business. In those cases, we categorized the returnee’s area of work, where the largest amount of support was spent.

Profile of the 15 women interviewed

This report is mainly informed by the voices of 15 women interviewed during DRC's visit to Thailand in May 2025. These women shared their stories and experiences generously and courageously, providing insights into the nuances and complexities of their lives.

Ten interviews were conducted in person, while five took place online — either because the women were living outside Thailand at the time, or because they were in the far South, which was not logistically possible for DRC to reach during the visit. The DRC delegation visited most of the regions of Thailand together with CT, meeting the women in their own settings.

Thirteen of the women were identified as persons subjected to human trafficking and two were rejected asylum seekers.

The women were between 28 and 48 years old, with an average age of 38 at the time of the visit.

Nine of the 15 women had spent less than six months in Denmark, while a few had spent several years in Denmark before returning.

Nine of the 15 women were mothers, and most (12) also supported other relatives other than their children. Four of the returnees interviewed had children who also received reintegration support. Their ages ranged from 1 to 17 years, and, in line with the general pattern, most of the support was allocated to school-related expenses.

The 15 reintegration projects

The reintegration projects of the 15 women reflected the overall patterns among the 59 projects described earlier in this report. They included:

- two small retail shops
- five farming activities
- four beauty or massage salons
- and four food businesses

On average, it took approximately 2,5 months from arrival in Thailand until the reintegration plans of the 15 women were developed and approved by the Danish Return Agency after which activities could be implemented.

Roughly half of the projects were run jointly with family members (e.g. a family-run farming), while the other half were managed independently by the women themselves (e.g. nail salon). Further details of these projects are presented later in the report.

Motivations for travelling to Europe

The 15 women shared similar motivations for having travelled to Europe/Denmark. The primary reason mentioned by all was the need to earn money and the secondary motivation was the general desire to improve their lives and secure a better future. The two reasons were, however, closely linked to each other, as the hope for a better future was for the women often inseparably tied to the ability to earn an income and achieve financial security.

Ladda, one of the women, stated it very clearly: *“I went to Denmark only to make money! I had one purpose.”*

Ladda had debts she wished to pay off and felt a strong obligation to provide for both her mother and her son. Her account reflects a broader pattern among the women interviewed as all 15 participants shared similar stories of being driven by financial necessity, often combined by debt, and by a deep sense of responsibility to support their families.

In many cases, the decision to travel to Europe involved taking on further debt in order to finance the journey – an investment based on the expectation of future earnings.

Another woman, Aree, shared why she went to Denmark. She said it was about: *“Just money...! I saw an advertisement on Facebook to go and work with massage”*.

Although a few women also mentioned that their decision to travel to Denmark was influenced by personal relationships, such as having met a Danish partner, the pursuit of financial security remained the central motivation.

Understanding these motivations is important because they often influence the women’s experiences after return. For many, the process after return was complicated by the fact that they did not manage to earn the money they had hoped for and that shaped their sense of success, agency, and well-being after returning.

Being a provider

The strong economic motivation was closely intertwined with the women’s role as providers. Most of the women carried the responsibility of being partly or main breadwinners for their families.

Nine of the women had children, and many also supported other family members. In total, 12 of the women provided financial support to relatives in addition to their children.

One of them was 42-year-old Prapa. We met her in her family home where she worked in farming and lived with several relatives. For many years, Prapa’s life had been shaped by the responsibility of supporting multiple family members – her parents, a younger brother, an uncle who suffered from significant physical and cognitive disabilities, and her own daughter. She had secured education for both her brother and daughter and had lived abroad for extended periods, including approximately a year in Denmark and periods in other European countries. She had inherited some debt from her mother, but her brother and daughter were approaching the point where they would be able to support themselves, and the financial responsibility she carried was thus gradually becoming more shared.

Another woman we met was Meena. We met her in her nail salon established with the support of her reintegration funds. Meena told us that she did not have to provide for multiple family members (unlike Prapa) but was instead a single mother with sole responsibility for 13-year-old daughter. Meena traveled to Denmark only to provide for her daughter, wanting to secure a better life for her. During Meena’s time in Denmark, her daughter was cared for by a close friend. Meena’s daughter had recently been awarded a scholarship to attend a private boarding school, and Meena expressed pride in her daughter’s accomplishments and in her own role as a single mother.

She said: *“My mother was a single mother who raised three children. I am also a single mother, and I am raising my daughter myself. I am proud of this.”*

The expectation to provide

For most of the women, the role and responsibility of providing for their families was taken as a given. The responsibility could be experienced as empowering but at the same time also as a heavy burden. Prapa, for example, did previously feel quite burdened by her responsibilities, but over time she had been able to secure a good education for both her younger brother and her daughter, and as they were now approaching the point of taking over some of the responsibility, it left Prapa with a sense of achievement. Also, Meena expressed pride and strength as a single mother.

For some women, being able to meet this responsibility thus became a source of pride and fulfillment—at least over time—as was the case for Prapa and Meena. For others, however, when circumstances prevented them from living up to these expectations, the same responsibility could become a source of frustration and feelings of failure.

For Aree, who had been back in Thailand for a little over a year, her return was marked by mixed feelings. On the one hand, she was happy to be reunited with her two children. On the other, she explained that she felt frustrated at having been arrested only four months after arriving in Denmark. During her time in Denmark, she had only been able to

pay a bit of her debts to traffickers and had not been able to send any money home to her family in Thailand – leaving her unable to support them in the way she had intended and was expected to.

Aree said: *“I was happy to return. I was happy to see my family, my two children, but I worry about money.”*

Similarly, another woman, Thara, also felt pressured by the weight of responsibility and her family’s expectations. We met Thara in Pattaya, where she shared her story. She was originally from Northern Thailand, where her family still lived. Thara had recently returned to Thailand from Denmark, four months earlier, after spending seven years in Denmark and several more in other European countries. For many years, she had supported her family in Thailand financially through earnings from sex work. When we met her, Thara had not yet told her family that she was back in Thailand. She explained that they would expect more money from her, and that she no longer wanted any contact with them. According to Thara, poverty in the North means families often have high expectations, and her own family had relied heavily on her. She felt they demanded too much from her, and mentioned that when she needed support, they did not help her.

Thara said: *“I would not recommend anybody to have my job... the work I did [in Europe]... it is hard, but I had to support my family. (...) my family thinks that you live like queens and kings in Europe, but it is not like that”.*

Another woman, Nana, shared her experiences after being arrested in Denmark and described feeling an urgent need to return to Thailand as quickly as possible to continue earning money for her family: *“I was in the massage shop. We were three women there. The door rang, I opened, and it was the police. We got arrested (...) I was given information about the shelter, they said that I could stay there for as long as I needed (...) But I knew that my family back home [in Thailand] needed money, so I couldn’t stay. I needed to go home.”* Hereafter Nana began to cry and was clearly affected by the memory. Nana continued about her time in Denmark *“It was just work. A lot of work! (...) I had to work very hard to pay back (...) Only last year I finished the loans. Phew...”,* she said, *“it was hard. It is better now”.*

Porjai: Education in exchange for a lifelong role as provider

We had arranged to meet Porjai at her family home and chicken farm in Northern Thailand. When we arrived, however, we learned that Porjai had a few days earlier travelled to the south of Thailand for work. She had, instead, arranged for her two older sisters to welcome us and they showed us around the family chicken farm, which had been established with Porjai’s reintegration funds. They explained how responsibilities are shared: their mother managed the sales while one of the sisters took care of the chickens. Eggs were sold to local buyers through online communication within the village. Later the same day, we managed to connect with Porjai via video call. She explained that she divides her time between her hometown in the North and a city in the South, where she worked to support herself and her family.

Porjai shared that she is the main provider for her entire family: her mother, her two sisters, and occasionally a nephew. Asked why, Porjai explained that her role in the family was linked to a decision her father made in the past. Her father could only afford to send one child to school, and he chose Porjai. That is why Porjai now carried the responsibility of providing for her family. *“It is okay,”* Porjai explained, *“because they [my sisters] sacrificed”.*



The farm had around 400 chickens and generated an average daily income of app. 1,000 THB (\approx 200 DKK), though this varies depending on sales.

Burdened by debt linked to exploitation

A significant proportion of the 15 women (12) reported currently struggling or having previously struggled with heavy debt. Some carried debt from their time in Europe, most often linked to exploitation, while others owed money to informal lenders in Thailand – usually loans taken to finance their journey to Europe. These informal loans fall outside any formal regulatory framework and are often associated with extremely high interest rates. In some cases, the women took on more debt to pay for their trip to Europe, hoping they would earn enough money in the future to repay it.

Meena, the single mother, whom we met in her nail salon, explained that she had accumulated debt during her time in Denmark, linked to her exploitation in sex work and the payments demanded by traffickers. Like many of the other women we spoke to, she was told to pay both taxes and the money she 'owed'. Meena explained: *“They lied to me and said I had to pay tax, but in reality, the money went to them”*.

Since returning to Thailand, Meena had stopped making payments to them. *“In the beginning, I was afraid they would come after me, but as time goes on, I'm not so concerned anymore,”* she said. For her safety, Meena preferred to remain anonymous in this report, including the specific location in Thailand where she lived.

Many women shared similar experiences of fear after return linked to debts and exploitation. Saijai, for example, initially feared that traffickers would follow her to Thailand, as she had shared her address with them. After more than two years back in Thailand without being contacted, she was only now gradually beginning to feel safer.

The women also described an intense pressure to work continuously in order to repay debts. Saijai recalls *“I worked so hard to pay back my tax [illegal debt]. I worked SO hard. I paid 800,000 Thai baht to the traffickers”* (app. 157,000 DKK). Saijai explained that in Denmark, the owner of the sex clinic took half of her salary, and from what remained she had to pay the so-called “tax,” which amounted to almost 50% of her share. Similarly, a woman named Sodsai shared that she had to pay 8,000 baht (app. 1,500 DKK) in interest alone each month.

Ladda: Trapped in illegal debt for years

We met Ladda in the small local shop she established from her reintegration support. The shop sold dry goods, snacks, soft drinks, shampoo, and other everyday items. Today, Ladda had no significant debt except for an official car loan. However, this stood in sharp contrast to her previous situation, where she was heavily indebted to informal lenders and traffickers for years.

Ladda had travelled to Europe twice, first in 2023 and again in 2024. The first time was motivated by both the hope of finding a good husband and the need of earning money to repay debts she owed to informal lenders in Thailand – loans with extreme high and illegal interest rates. The second time, she travelled to Europe, was, however, solely for financial reasons.

She said: *“I only went to Europe again to make money, nothing else! I wanted to pay off my debt!”*

In Denmark, a large portion of what Ladda earned was taken by traffickers. Ladda shared with us that after her arrest in Denmark, she became deeply depressed and experienced suicidal thoughts. The overwhelming pressure of her debt felt unbearable, especially as she feared she would never be able to repay what she owed and move on with her life.

Ladda's debts have followed and haunted her for years. The traffickers, she owed money to, kept pressuring and threatening her and for a long time, Ladda tried to repay all of her debts. After her recent return to Thailand in 2025 she kept paying but also started feeling that she over the years had paid enough. She eventually found the courage to confront the lenders. She warned them that she had installed video surveillance in her shop and threatened to report them to the police if they contacted her again. Although it was a risky strategy and she was afraid, she believed it was time to stand her ground. Since then, she has not been contacted by them. She believed the strategy only worked because she had already paid far more than the original amount – including extremely high (and illegal) interest rates over a very long period. Without that, it wouldn't have worked at all.

Today, some months have gone by, and Ladda described feeling a huge relief now that she felt that the debts are behind her. *“I am good, and my experiences are with me - in my strengths,”* she says. She explained that she felt more at peace and no longer so burdened by exploitation and heavy debt.

Starting a business

All 15 women used (part of) their reintegration funds to start small businesses. Remaining funds went to cover different needs such as housing, healthcare, transport (for example a motorbike). The Danish Return Agency allows the funds to be spent in many different ways, provided that the activities contribute to some form of sustainability.

The 15 business projects established with reintegration funds included:

Two retail shops

- **Clothing shop.** One returnee invested her reintegration funds in opening a clothing shop. She had been back in Thailand for approximately three years now and she had been able to expand and open a second shop, which she now ran with support from her mother. The shops sold clothes with a profit margin of around 100 THB (\approx 20 DKK) per item, providing an average daily income of around 2,000 THB (\approx 400 DKK). Initially, her shop was located in a less central spot and did not generate much profit, but after relocating closer to the main street she experienced significantly better sales.
- **Small grocery shop.** Another returnee used her reintegration funds to establish a small convenience shop in the neighborhood where she grew up. The shop sold daily dry goods, and because it stayed open until after midnight, she was now considering installing a serving window for safety reasons. She also dreamt of expanding with a small food stall outside, as the area had many workers from nearby factories but no food available after 8pm. Her mother helped by opening the shop at seven in the morning, while she herself handled restocking every two to three days from a wholesaler. As the shop often stayed open past midnight, she occasionally slept there. On average, the shop generated a daily profit of 600–700 THB (\approx 115-130 DKK), which was enough for her to cover daily expenses but not enough to save up money. She therefore hoped the planned food stall could increase her earnings.

Five farming initiatives

- **Chicken farm.** One returnee invested her reintegration funds in establishing a chicken farm with approximately 400 chickens. The farm generated an average daily income of around 1,000 THB (\approx 200 DKK), though this varied depending on sales. Eggs were sold within the village, with the returnee's mother managing sales and her sisters taking care of the chickens. The farm provided a stable income and was considered a good business.
- **Duck and cow farming.** Another returnee used her reintegration funds to expand her family's farm by purchasing ducks and four cows. The cows had since bred, bringing the total number to eleven cows. The ducks provided additional income and food for the household. Her parents managed the daily care of the animals. This investment had strengthened the family's livelihood and created a more stable source of income.
- **Durian plantation and pig farming.** One returnee used her reintegration funds to plant 200 seedlings of durian trees on family-owned land that was already used for mangoes and other crops. She also invested in pig farming buying one female breeding pig and eight piglets, but this was unsuccessful as the pigs had died from disease. The durian plantation was expected to provide a good annual income for the family.
- **Mixed farming on family land.** One returnee invested her reintegration funds in expanding agricultural activities on land already owned by her family. Investments included sugar cane and rice cultivation, animal raising (cows, fish, and frogs), vegetable gardening, and mushroom production. Additional funds were used for fertilizers and solar-powered lighting in the rice paddies. These activities provided a combination of daily and seasonal income, supporting both household consumption and sales, and had strengthened the family's overall livelihood.
- **Rat farming.** One returnee, who returned to Thailand in 2021, invested her reintegration funds in establishing a rat farm, raising approximately 80 rats for sale as food. Rats were sold primarily to neighbors, with prices ranging from 200–250 THB per kilo, and up to 300 THB if prepared for cooking. The business had closed due to limited profitability, rising feed costs, and declining demand of rat meat after COVID-19.

Four beauty/massage salons

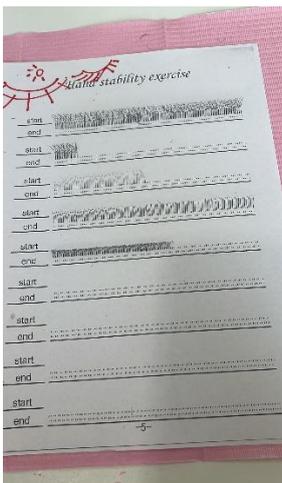
- **After-care pregnancy massage.** One returnee opened a massage clinic offering specialized post-pregnancy care. She was certified and trained to provide proper after-care massage. Initially, the clinic had few customers, but

over time she established a regular clientele and also formed a partnership with a local health clinic, enhancing the credibility and reach of her services.

- **Massage clinic.** Another woman established a massage clinic in a tourist area, building her reputation and customer base over time. The business now provided a stable income.
- **Nail salon.** One returnee ran a nail salon combined with her living space. The salon operated from around 9–10 a.m. until 8–9 p.m., but when customer demand was high, she worked sometimes until very late at night. The business provided a livelihood, but seasonal income varied significantly, and it required long working hours.
- **Nail services (in training).** Another returnee was currently completing training in eyelash and manicure techniques. She was practicing her skills in preparation for opening her own salon in the future.

Four food businesses

- **Home-based and mobile noodle shop.** One woman invested in a noodle business operated from her home, which also offered mobile delivery. The business provided daily income, but it was not the sole source of income for her or her family.
- **Mobile food stall.** Another returnee invested in a motorbike food stall, selling noodles and papaya salad. Sales were affected by the weather, and on rainy days she sometimes used the downtime to repair the food stall instead of selling food.
- **Leased outdoor noodle restaurant.** One woman took over an existing lease to operate a small outdoor noodle restaurant. As she very recently returned to Thailand, she was still adjusting and learning how to manage the business.
- **Noodle stall.** Another returnee opened a noodle stall in a market now primarily managed by her parents. The income was irregular, providing some household support but not offering a consistent profit.



Training in eyelash and manicure techniques, practicing skills in preparation for opening her own salon in the future.

Building on already existing skills

Many of the projects were rooted in the women's and their families' already existing skills and experiences. For instance, one of the women chose to invest in cooking and selling noodles, a trade she was already familiar with. Similarly, the farming projects were often established on family-owned land already in use – for example, duck breeding, where the family already kept a few ducks but with the funds they were able to expand and thus secure a higher income. In this way, the support could in some instances reinforce and scale up what was already familiar, rather than introducing entirely new forms of livelihood.

From noodles to crepes. Adjusting the business

Aree who had been back in Thailand for a little over a year initially established a mobile food stall selling noodles and papaya salad. However, she eventually adjusted her business, as the income from noodles was insufficient and there

were many other sellers of the same product in the area. With guidance from her CT counsellor, she decided to try something different. She realized that sweet crepes could be a better business opportunity, as only a few others were selling them and there are many schools in her area. Believing that schoolchildren, in particular, would be interested, she taught herself to make crepes by watching YouTube tutorials, practiced at home, and gradually shifted her business. According to Aree, the new stall had become very popular although her income still was not quite enough to make her economically self-reliant.

Less successful investments

Not all of the returnees' investments had been successful. One woman's pig farming project failed when the pigs died from disease. Another project – rat breeding – had also closed due to declining demand and high costs. Furthermore, the massage clinic that offered specialized post-pregnancy care, had to scale back as the returnee who was trained and certified in this specific massage had left to work outside Thailand again. The clinic was now operated by her mother and only provides regular massage services.

Taking time to think it through

Generally, a reintegration plan must be developed and approved within the first three months after arrival. The plan outlines how the reintegration budget should be spent. Some returnees have a clear idea on how to best use their available support. Others need time to settle, explore their options, and decide in collaboration with the reintegration partner how to allocate the reintegration budget effectively and meaningfully. For persons subjected to human trafficking, cash support is provided during the first six months after arrival. This gives them a minor, basic income and the opportunity to adjust after return. In comparison, rejected asylum seekers do not receive such support and often need to secure an income more quickly.

One woman, Saijai, took a long time to decide how to use her reintegration support, carefully thinking it through over several months. At first, she considered a nail-care course but eventually after thorough consideration she chose to invest in her parents' land by establishing a durian plantation and buying pigs.



Durian plantation on family-owned land, created using reintegration funds to plant 200 durian seedlings in 2023

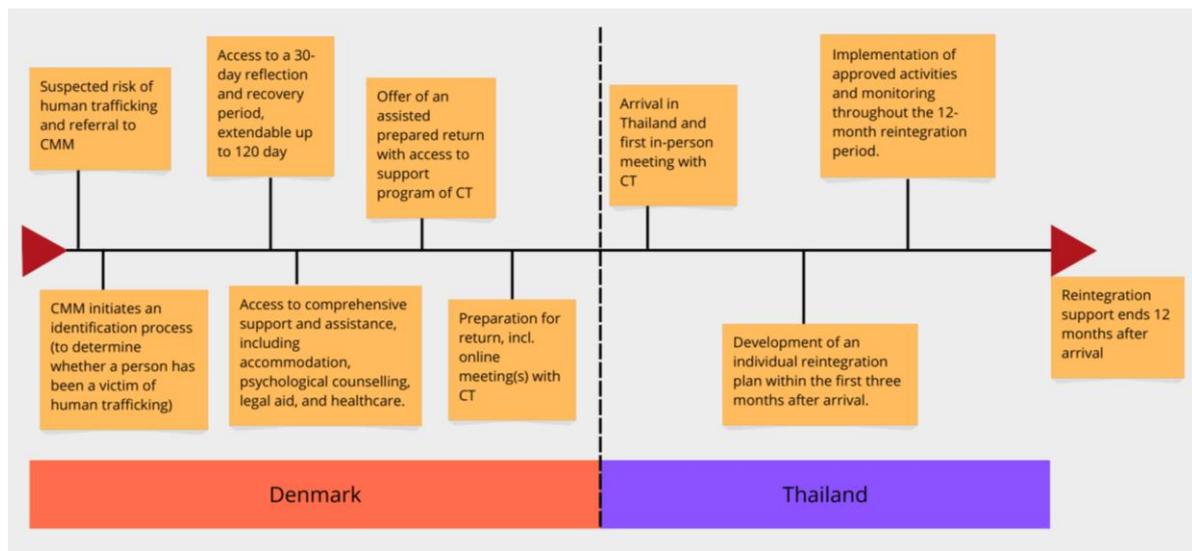
Even though the pigs later died from disease, she still saw the durian farm as a more sustainable, long-term investment than an individual project like nail care. She said that because the land belongs to her family, it provided both present and future security. Her parents cultivated it now, generating income for the family, and in the future, she will retain ownership and can engage other farmers on a profit-sharing basis. So even without working on the land herself, she believed this will ensure an ongoing income opportunity for her over the long term.

Unlike Saijai, Ladda decided quickly on what to do. She planned to stay in Pattaya and had chosen a business there, transferring a deposit for a rental space even before leaving Denmark. The owner had made the opportunity sound

very promising – high income, good location, and a strong market. As it sounded a bit too good to be true, a CT counsellor decided to travel to Pattaya to check the shop. The visit revealed that the owner had exaggerated the shop’s potential and misrepresented the location. It was not a good site for a business, and although Ladda lost her deposit, it turned out to be a good decision not to move forward.

The experience motivated Ladda to rethink her plan. After a period of reflection and counselling, she visited her hometown in the Northeast of Thailand with her CT counsellor to explore alternatives. Eventually, she decided to stay in her hometown and invested in a small retail shop selling dry goods. She was now satisfied with her decision, appreciating being close to her community and family.

Counselling process in brief



Counselling begins before departure and continues throughout the 12-month reintegration period. Key elements include:

- **Assigned counsellor**
Caritas Thailand assigns a dedicated counsellor to each individual returnee.
- **Pre-return counselling**
Video meetings between the returnee and assigned counsellor from Caritas Thailand are offered to build trust, manage expectations, and ensure a safe and transparent process. More than one meeting can be arranged if needed.
- **Airport pick-up**
If needed, returnees can be met at the airport by their counsellor to facilitate a good arrival and safe transition.
- **Ongoing counselling and accompaniment**
The counsellor provides guidance and accompanies returnees as needed, depending on the circumstances. Counselling sessions are preferably conducted in person but can also take place remotely through phone/online platforms due to long distances.
- **Development of an individual reintegration plan**
A reintegration plan is developed collaboratively between the returnee and the counsellor describing how funds will be spent. The plan requires approval from the Danish Return Agency within three months after return.
- **Implementation of approved activities**
Once the plan is approved, activities can be carried out.
- **Monitoring**
Development is regularly monitored throughout the 12-month reintegration period.

Family-based businesses

Eight out of the 15 business projects, established by the women with their reintegration funds, were supported by family members. This was the case for all six farming initiatives, where land and property belonged to the family. We also observed family involvement in other types of projects, including a food shop and a clothing store. The more individual projects included four beauty salons, a few food shops and a convenience store.

Family-based projects often made practical sense, given the shared responsibility of providing for the household. Families could contribute with both labor and local knowledge about how to generate an income within a particular field, and in some cases thereby strengthen the sustainability of the business.

Family-run businesses are of course generally less individual in nature. Decision-making about the use of reintegration funds and the direction of the business are shared with family members and this can sometimes limit the returnee's autonomy and ability to make independent choices.

Nana: A joint family decision with personal future prospects

Nana invested most of her reintegration support in sugar cane and rice farming combined with animal farming in Northern Thailand. Before deciding to focus on farming, she discussed with her family how the funds could be used most effectively. She initiated the farming project herself and worked there for some time before moving to Bangkok, where she is currently employed.

Nana's uncle took over managing the farm, which provided income for her mother, who was diagnosed with muscle atrophy, as well as for her uncle. Without this arrangement, Nana would have been expected to contribute financially to her mother. Nana planned to remain in Bangkok for a period, but her long-term goal was to return home.

Nana said: *"I plan to stay in my hometown, not Bangkok. I have to take care of my mother. When my mother is not there [no longer alive], I will stay there [on the farm] and live my life. I want to earn money, and I love agriculture, so I will work on the farm. That is what I want".*

Although the reintegration project was currently managed by her uncle, it is closely linked to Nana's personal hopes for the future. It was evident that Nana had a genuine passion for farming, which strongly motivated her involvement. The farm thus provided valuable income now and also represented her long-term plan (and hope) to return and work the land, making the investment meaningful both now and for the future.

Some of the reintegration initiatives were initially started as joint family projects but were eventually completely taken over by family members. This was the case with the durian plantation where Saijai was initially involved in the day-to-day work but now only visited her family occasionally. She lived and worked in the nearby city, and all income from the plantation went to her parents. This arrangement allowed Saijai to retain more of her earnings from her work in the city, as she would otherwise have been expected to contribute financially to the family.

A total of six of the 15 projects were left for the women's families to manage because the women had either left Thailand again (3) or moved away from the local area where the reintegration project was established (3). Of these six family-run projects, one had since closed (rat-farming initiative). Nonetheless, the women still contributed indirectly. As Fahsai, who now lived in Germany with her German husband, explained: *"Only sometimes does my family ask me for money, because they now earn some from the reintegration project."*

Although the reintegration support is formally directed at the individual returnee, in practice it was thus shaped by these shared responsibilities and it affected how the women accessed and navigated the support, reflecting their roles and priorities within the wider family context. For the women, their wishes and needs were closely connected to those of their children, parents, and extended families, making it difficult to separate their individual needs from their family responsibilities.

Determination and pride

Across the interviews, the women’s narratives reflected determination and agency, often taking pride in their achievements despite challenging circumstances. Like Prapa and Meena, who experienced their role as family providers as empowering (at least over time) because they were able to fulfill their responsibilities. Many of the women also felt empowered as they managed to establish successful income-generating activities or independently start and run a business.

“I am my own boss now”

Nawee, for example, had spent four years in Denmark before returning to Thailand about a year ago. She established a massage salon with her reintegration funds, and it had grown successfully and now employed four people.

Throughout the interview, it was clear that Nawee understandably was very proud of her business. She said it allowed her to work in a field she enjoys while being her own boss and it gave her a strong sense of independence and ownership.

Nawee reflected: *“I never thought of opening my own shop (...) I am my own boss now. No one suppresses me (...)”*.

“I have expectations now”

Another woman who was not one of the 15 women we met in 2025 but a returnee we met during our visit back in 2022, put it quite simple then: *“I have expectations now”*, she said, while comparing how she felt earlier in her life. After her return to Thailand, she used her reintegration funds to complete a training in nail care, along with certification and the necessary equipment to run her own mobile nail salon. When we met her in Bangkok in 2022, the business was doing reasonably well despite the aftermath of covid-19, and she was very content and proud of her accomplishments.

The brief statement *“I have expectations now”* reflected that she had developed higher expectations for her life and herself now and a stronger belief in what she could achieve.



A returnee invested her reintegration funds to open this nail salon in early 2025, marking the start of her own business.

Stigma and silence

Alongside their strong agency and determination, many of the women however also struggled with fragile mental health and were deeply affected by their past experiences. It was clear that the majority were still coping with the emotional impact of what they had been through.

“When I am alone it is difficult”

Sodsai, for instance, described herself as deeply traumatized. We met her in Northern Thailand just a few months after her return to Thailand. She shared that she was trying to adjust after her return and trying to stay busy. She had come to Denmark after a difficult situation in Southern Europe, where she had been promised seasonal work picking fruit. Upon her arrival, there was no job, and she did not know what to do. She eventually ended up in Denmark, where she was subjected to sexual exploitation through deception and debt.

Sodsai shared that she worried a lot, she found it difficult to be close to her husband, who was currently working outside Thailand, and she was unsure whether she would ever fully adjust and be herself again. None of her relatives knew what happened; she kept it to herself. She recently joined her aunt in a ritual cleansing ceremony, and she hoped that she in time would feel a bit better. On the positive side, Sodsai mentioned that she had gained some needed weight after her return and was feeling just a bit more balanced.

Placing her hand on her heart, Sodsai said: *“When I am with my son, I am okay. When I am alone, it is difficult. When I see drunk people at work [a restaurant], the memories return”*.

After our interview, Sodsai was referred by CT to specialized support within the Catholic network in Thailand. It was, however, unclear whether she would make use of the support offered.

Most of the women interviewed chose, like Sodsai, not to share their experiences in Denmark with others after their return. Rather than telling relatives or friends what had happened, they created cover stories about their journey to Europe. Several had endured highly traumatic experiences and were struggling with feelings of shame or depression.

A few returnees also described having experienced thoughts of suicide, either right after their arrest in Denmark or following their return to Thailand. This was often linked to concerns about debt, threats from loan sharks, and the distress of returning without having achieved their goal of earning money to support their families.

Fahsai who returned to Thailand from Denmark in early February 2023, said she did not tell anyone what really happened. She told her parents that she had come back from Denmark only to prepare for marriage with her German boyfriend. *“I felt like a failure. Nothing I had planned worked out the way I hoped. But I feel better now,”* she said, adding that her German boyfriend, now husband, turned out to be a very good man who supports and helps her.

Thara was the woman who chose to no longer have contact with her family after her return. She explained: *“When I think about the future, it is only one day at a time. I try not to think too far ahead but instead just set a goal for each day - like today, I have to go to school [for nail care training]”*.

Saijai, another woman, repeatedly said *“it’s okay”*, explaining that she did not feel the need to talk to anyone about her experiences. She preferred not to disclose them. Her only concern in that regard was her friend who knew what happened in Denmark. She described the friend as *“not a good friend”* and worried that she might spread rumors about what they did in Denmark. The possibility of such disclosure made her anxious. If others were to find out, she feared being stigmatized and judged.

The women we spoke with shared a fear of stigma. For one of them, however, this fear was doubled: in addition to concerns related to her experiences in Denmark, she also lived with the fear of being stigmatized due to her illness. She was living with HIV, a diagnosis she did not disclose to anyone. During our conversation, she chose not to speak about it in detail – a choice we of course respected. She underlined the severity of the matter, saying only: *“It is extreme”*.

Her silence reflected the social risks she associated with disclosure. She worried that if her condition was revealed, it might harm her livelihood in massage work, as customers were not well informed about the illness and might fear transmission. In this way, she carried a double burden: the silence imposed by stigma surrounding her return from Denmark and the silence surrounding her health condition.

“I keep going”: a strategy of empowerment

When asked why they chose not to share their experiences with others, most of the women explained that they did not want to burden their families with the difficulties they had faced and preferred to leave the past behind rather than dwell on what had happened in Denmark.

For many, this approach appeared to be a coping mechanism, a way of positioning themselves in the present – as women who took care of themselves and, when possible, their families. While the journey to Europe – and Denmark in particular – often involved deeply harmful experiences, the women’s focus was on the present and future, framing their narratives around resilience and responsibility.

Ladda described her perspective by saying: *“I am good, and my experiences are with me – in my strengths,”* explaining that she holds on to her experiences privately and now regarded them as a source of strength.

Sodsai emphasized that her strategy was to stay busy and keep moving forward. She expected that, in time, she would feel better, as long as she continued to work her way through the challenges she faced.

When asked openly how things were going, Aree simply answered: *“I keep going.”* This short response reflected her ongoing effort and endurance. She was focused on *‘moving forward’* despite challenges, including an unstable relationship, caring for her two children, a son who had dropped out of school, and financial difficulties.

As previously mentioned, reluctance to discuss previous experiences was a common reason given to CT for declining to participate in an interview with DRC. Several of the women we did manage to speak with echoed this sentiment and explained that they did not feel the need to reopen old experiences, but would rather move on, keep going.

Across the interviews, the women highlighted the connection between economic stability and psychological wellbeing. The possibility of earning an income and providing for themselves and their families seemed to be directly tied to their sense of agency and wellbeing. As several noted, they did not have the time or energy to dwell on the past, as the immediate need to make a living, move forward, and support themselves was more pressing and their highest priority.

CT had encountered extremely few cases in which returnees have reported those who exploited or harmed them to the Thai police. According to CT, this reluctance was primarily due to the returnees’ desire to move on and distance themselves from past experiences.

“The storms have passed”

There were notable differences in how the women viewed their life and return to Thailand. Some continued to struggle financially and expressed a general sense of uncertainty about the future. Others – often more older women – appeared calmer and more settled, as though they had moved beyond the most difficult periods of their lives.

For instance, where Aree had to *“keep going,”* Prapa, in contrast, said: *“The storms have passed. Everything is settled.”* Aree was the young mother who described her daily life as an effort to push forward, keep going, and try to take good care of her children. She also shared her frustration of being arrested just four months after arriving in Denmark and not having been able to send money home and thus not achieving what she had set out to do.

Prapa, several years older and with extensive experience living abroad both in Europe and other countries, was at a very different stage in life. She had long carried full responsibility of supporting her daughter and younger brother through school and providing for her family. Now, as this responsibility was gradually becoming more shared Prapa was experiencing a growing sense of contentment and stability, which was why she felt the *“storms have passed”*.

These experiences illustrated the diversity among the women; while some were still navigating difficult circumstances and the ongoing pressures of providing for their families, others had with time achieved a higher level of stability.

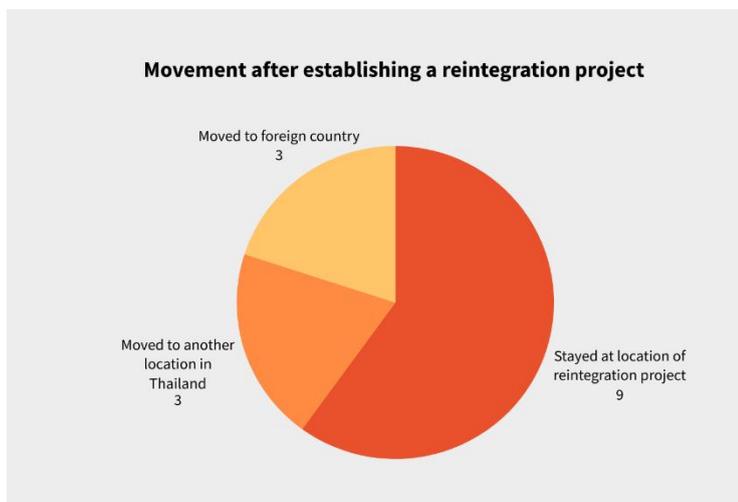
Still on the move

For most of the women, however, ‘the storms had not (yet) passed’ and terms such as *returning*, *going home*, or *reintegrating* did not imply settling permanently, returning to their region of origin, or reuniting with family. Rather, the majority of the women intended to *keep moving*, *keep going*.

An example was Kaewjai who returned to Thailand from Denmark in the summer of 2024 and was now living in Saudi Arabia. Since her return, she had worked in Hong Kong and had now been in Saudi Arabia for some months. Her plan was to move to Bulgaria if she could secure a proper work permit. She had friends in Bulgaria whom she knew from her time living and working in Turkey. “*But I dream about being at home [in Thailand]*”, she said and shared that her hope was to be able to train others in massage. Kaewjai was trained in specialized after-care pregnancy massage.

As mentioned previously, CT estimated that approximately half of the 61 women who had participated in the program since 2020 might have left Thailand again, either on a temporary or long-term basis, mainly because low earnings made it difficult to cover living costs and repay debts. Others remained for various reasons, including e.g. family responsibilities or improved household finances as children completed their education as in Prapa’s case.

Of the 15 women interviewed, three had left Thailand again to Denmark, Germany, and Saudi Arabia. Among those remaining in Thailand, another three had moved away from the local area where their reintegration project was established. Some expressed a hope to leave Thailand again, while others said they wished to remain and build a life; for some, the latter appeared more as a hope than a concrete plan.



Thara for instance who had returned to Thailand from Denmark in early 2025 shared that she, currently, had no plans to leave Thailand again, as she felt at home. She stayed seven years in Denmark and, prior to that, worked and lived in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. At the same time, she acknowledged that she could not be certain she would not leave Thailand again in the future. “*It is just me and my happy life, no husband, no children*”, she said.

Wilai: From an unsustainable business and limited opportunities to a return to Denmark

In early 2021, Wilai, 28 years old at the time, returned from Denmark to Chaiyaphum Province in the Northeastern Isan region, where she established a family-based rat farming initiative on her family's land, living with her grandparents.

DRC first met Wilai in Thailand in 2022, during DRC's first field visit to Thailand two years after the launch of the program. At that time, she was managing approximately 80 rats of different sizes, organized in breeding pits with support from her family. The income from rat farming was app. 200–250 THB per kilo, with slightly higher earnings – up to 300 THB per kilo – if the rats were prepared for cooking. Her primary buyers were neighbors rather than market vendors. Despite sales, profits were declining, due to rising feed costs and the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the rat farm, Wilai had briefly attempted to run a mobile food stall, also supported through reintegration funds. However, this initiative was discontinued because of increasing costs and low sales.

At the time (in 2022), Wilai shared that her social life was somewhat challenging: many of her friends had moved away, and the farm was in an isolated location with not much to do. Even though she valued being reunited with her grandparents and helping them with daily tasks, Wilai was considering her future options. She was considering applying for work at a factory in Chonburi or if possible, returning to Denmark. Wilai was in a relationship with Martin, a man she had met in Denmark prior to her return.

In early 2025, DRC reconnected with Wilai during an online meeting from Thailand, while she herself had by then relocated back to Denmark to live with Martin as she had hoped for. Unlike her previous stay in Denmark, she was now in the country legally, hoping to obtain a residence permit. She expressed significant satisfaction with her current situation, reporting that she was happy living with her boyfriend, occasionally joining him at work, and beginning to learn Danish. Looking ahead, she described plans to eventually move with him to Thailand once he retires.



Online meeting between Wilai and DRC delegation and CT, May 2025



Rat farming initiative in Chaiyaphum Province, Isan region, supported through reintegration funds (visit, May 2022). The initiative is no longer operating, as it has proved unsustainable in the long run due to rising costs and a decline in demand for rat meat following the COVID-19 pandemic

Five of the 15 the women – including Wilai - had partners from abroad: some had partners living in Thailand, others maintained long-distance relationships, and a few had moved to their partner’s country. For instance, Fahsai who returned to Thailand from Denmark in early 2023. She now had a German husband and had moved to Germany, where she was learning German in preparation for applying for a job. However, she said, *“I want to grow old in Thailand”* and reflected *“living here is not easy; it is complex. Life in Thailand feels easier for me”*. Like Wilai and Martin, Fahsai and her husband had already made a decision to move to Thailand in about ten years, provided that her husband can retire early.

Seeking work abroad again and preventive counselling to avoid re-exploitation

In CT’s experience it was most often a combination of unresolved debts, poverty, weak social networks, and family pressures that drive many of the returnees to seek employment outside Thailand’s borders.

Nana was one of the women who, after her return in the summer 2024, considered going abroad again due to financial pressures. She saw what looked like a promising job advertisement on Facebook for a job abroad but before doing anything she reached out to her CT counsellor, as she had previously been encouraged to do in such cases. The counsellor reviewed the offer and also requested the CT office in Chiang Mai to verify the address provided in the advertisement. The place was found not to exist, suggesting that the offer was unreliable.

Nana’s decision to reach out to her counsellor illustrates both the trust built in their relationship and the relevance of preventive counselling. Today, Nana works in Bangkok and has plans eventually to return to her home region in Northern Thailand, where she had invested her reintegration support in strengthening the family farm.

Perspectives on the support provided

The following briefly describes the women’s perspectives on the support they received both up to departure and after return. The feedback must, however, be understood in the context in which it was given, namely in the presence of DRC and CT, both directly involved in the provision of support which may have influenced the feedback.

The women did not always clearly distinguish between the different actors engaged in Denmark, such as the Danish Return Agency, DRC, the Centre against Human Trafficking etc.

Overall, the feedback was largely positive. Most of the women expressed satisfaction with the information and support provided before departure, describing the process as smooth and well-organized. The allocation of a specific counsellor from CT, who they could meet during a virtual meeting before arrival, was highlighted as particularly valuable, providing a sense of safety and continuity.

In the initial period after return, CT has observed that many returnees need to experience for themselves that the support offered is reliable, as trust is not immediate and some are initially cautious. Fahsai expressed it during an interview, saying that in the initial period after her return, she wondered: *“Will they really provide me with this support? I worried whether I could trust the program”*.

In CT’s experience, many returnees also hope for a smooth and quick process immediately after return but often need to learn through experience that challenges are part of the process. Administrative procedures, adapting to current economic conditions, and managing finances or starting a business often prove more difficult than anticipated by the returnees.

In this regard, several women emphasized the importance of being accompanied by a counsellor after return, noting that having someone to discuss concerns and challenges with contributed to a sense of trust and safety, at least over

time. One woman mentioned that with time *“I felt warm and safe because of the support”*, highlighting that the quality of the personal relationship was central to how the support was experienced.

At the same time, a few women reported challenges: one did not feel fully informed about the program or the processes after return, indicating gaps in communication prior to departure. Another shared that she did not actually understand all of the information she was given prior to departure and noted that the virtual meeting before arrival, conducted with multiple screens and participants, felt somewhat confusing.

What the women emphasized most in their feedback was their positive experience with CMM and the Danish support setup. In particular, the accommodation prior to departure was highlighted very positively. The women described the safe houses as welcoming and family-like environments, which they associated with safety and care.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has offered some insights into the complex realities of the women who have returned from Denmark to Thailand with reintegration support.

The reintegration program offers support to the women who have experienced human trafficking, enabling them and their families to establish or strengthen livelihood projects, secure a more stable income, and, not least, benefit from psychosocial support through holistic counselling. Yet, the women's experiences encompass challenges and dynamics that go beyond the immediate scope of the support provided. Persistent debt, economic insecurity, and the continuous expectation to provide for extended families coexist with fears of stigma and the silence surrounding their experiences.

For many, return is therefore not a clear end point but part of a continued process and why many of the women are still on the move, and still have to “*keep going*” as Aree puts it.

Recommendations

All the women interviewed were given an opportunity to share feedback and offer recommendations regarding the support they received, the program, and the overall process. However, given the roles of DRC and CT in providing support, it should be noted that the women's feedback may have been influenced by our presence. The recommendations presented here include both the women's reflections and those of DRC and CT.

Legal and safe migration

- A clear and consistent recommendation from all interviewed women is that others should avoid irregular migration and make sure that any travel occurs through legal channels, with all necessary procedures and permits in place.
- To enable this, access to legal migration pathways should be expanded, including improved opportunities to obtain residence permits, thereby supporting safe and regulated migration.

Reintegration support and assistance

- For rejected asylum seekers, the in-kind support should be complemented with a cash component.
- In general, ensure that financial reintegration support is sufficient to support sustainable reintegration, taking into account individual needs, local economic conditions, and the varying costs of rebuilding livelihoods. Currently, the same amount of support is provided regardless of the country of return; while this sum may be sufficient in Thailand, it is often inadequate in other countries where living costs are higher.
- General strengthening of psychosocial support components of reintegration programs, ensuring that such support is accessible to returnees after return without any deductions from the reintegration budget after return.

Peer support

- Promote meaningful peer-to-peer support and activities, e.g. enabling returnees to serve as mentors for newcomers or returnees with limited social networks. This, however, should be implemented with careful considerations of the many ethical dilemmas and challenges of peer support.

Identification of vulnerabilities and information sharing

- Strengthen procedures to ensure that all individual vulnerabilities - including those related to stigma, health, and trauma - are systematically identified and appropriately addressed, while ensuring that all relevant, and only relevant, information is shared systematically between partners - including from CMM to DRC to CT - with the informed consent of the returnees. This process should rigorously balance the protection of privacy and sensitive data with the need to disclose essential information.

Extract of DRC's global policy on return

DRC engages in return processes globally, including in the Danish context.

The following eight positions outline the overall framework for DRC's engagement in return processes globally – applicable in all return situations including asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs:

#1: All forcibly displaced persons have a right to be protected against refoulement, to receive protection and assistance in accordance with international human rights law and should not be forced or pressured through i.e. untenable conditions in the host country to return to the area of origin under unsafe circumstances and conditions non-conducive for reintegration.

#2: DRC respects the right of States to return individuals without legal residence provided the decision to deny asylum or to withdraw refugee status has been made with due regard to national and international human rights standards. However, DRC finds that refugees should not be subject to constant or regular reviews of their refugee status. The right to family unity should be respected and minors should never be returned in contravention of the best interest of the child, and the possibility to grant a humanitarian residence permit or similar to vulnerable groups for health related or other humanitarian reasons should be promoted.

#3: Inclusion and dignity of all concerned individuals must be upheld in the return process. Every return process must be carried out in a humane and dignified manner, where people concerned are given a chance to prepare and influence the return process.

#4: The right to return “all the way home” must be guaranteed. The return of all concerned individuals must be based on their right to return “all the way home” if they so wish. If the returnee wishes to be housed and reintegrated in other areas of the country of origin, this must be respected and supported on equal terms as the right to return home.

#5: Forced return, even if legally sanctioned, should be avoided as it often comes with measures that undermine human dignity, incl. detention and the use of force.

#6: Return must not be viewed as the mere physical movement of people back to their area of origin but should always be accompanied by post-return monitoring and meaningful reintegration support.

#7: Refugees and IDPs must be supported in building capacities and develop skills while in exile to enable dignified life and improve the chances for sustainable return.

#8: Return should not be seen or promoted in isolation. In a protracted crisis, all three durable solutions should be pursued simultaneously and a host-government's potential preference for return should never dilute DRC's programming and advocacy to promote local solutions and resettlement.

For further elaboration of the positions, see the full DRC Return policy.

https://pro.drc.ngo/media/byyhj4ml/drc-return-policy_external_oct-2018_update-jan2019.pdf

See also, DRC's Policy Brief on best practices for return counselling

<https://pro.drc.ngo/media/ngxjcln/drc-policy-brief-return-counselling-february-2019.pdf>

Thank you

Above all, our deepest gratitude goes to the women – the returnees, the survivors – who openly and bravely shared their stories and experiences, offering essential insights into their journeys and the challenges they face. For welcoming us into their homes, allowing us to meet their families, and for sharing details about reintegration projects and daily lives.

To Caritas Thailand for their invaluable support and collaboration since 2020. For the warm hospitality extended to us during our visits in 2022 and 2025, and for their solid professionalism and genuine care in ensuring the quality in program delivery. We also sincerely appreciate the thoughtful input and constructive feedback on this report.



About DRC

The DRC Danish Refugee Council assists refugees and internally displaced persons across the globe: we provide emergency aid, fight for their rights, and strengthen their opportunity for a brighter future. Our vision is a dignified life for all those who are displaced. DRC was founded in Denmark in 1956 and has since grown to become a leading international humanitarian organization. We work in conflict-affected areas, along the migration routes, and in the countries where refugees settle. In cooperation with local communities, we strive for responsible and sustainable solutions. We work toward successful integration and – whenever possible – for the fulfillment of the wish to return home. The DRC Asylum Division in Denmark has for decades been providing counselling to asylum seekers in all stages of the Danish asylum procedure, including in the return procedure.

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL