

# **Navigating Intersections of Immigration Policies and Sex Work Regulation**

A Qualitative Study on Migrant Sex Work in Denmark

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# Abstract

This thesis analyses how migrant sex workers are conceptualised and regulated by the Danish state. Through content analysis, guided by Carol Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach, this thesis examines how migrant sex workers are constructed as a 'problem' through their situatedness in different and intersecting policy fields. The flow of migrant sex workers is recognised within a transnational pattern of 'feminisation of migration', where women migrate to sell sex in their search for economic opportunities and to support their families. The analysis relies on the collection of various policy-related documents, including action plans, political statements, policy proposals, and parliamentary questions. Adopting the theoretical concepts of migrant 'illegality' and 'deportability', this thesis analyses how migrant sex workers are situated in a state of 'deportability' and 'illegality', outside of the legal spheres of society. Findings reveal how migrant sex workers are caught in binary categorisations: as victims of human trafficking, worthy of rescue, or as 'illegal' migrants, defined by their unregistered border crossing, facing deportation. This research highlights the need to adopt a broader global gaze, incorporating the factors of global inequality, poverty, and globalisation to provide a multifaceted perspective on the migratory trajectories faced by migrant sex workers.

*Keywords:* migration, sex work, deportation, trafficking, borders

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# 1. Introduction

The transnational movements of globalisation have transcended borders and boundaries within and between nation spaces. While forces of the international political economy have increased the flows of capital and goods across borders, the movement of people is increasingly restricted through immigration policies and border controls. Within these flows of movement, an increased group of women migrate to sell sex in European countries in their search for livelihood, economic opportunities, and stability. Two of the largest groups of migrant sex workers in Europe migrate from Thailand and Nigeria (Plambech, 2023). The flow of female migrants selling sex is recognised within a broader global pattern – the so-called ‘feminisation of migration’ – wherein women in particular are responsible for the development and well-being of their families through migration (Bastia & Haagsman, 2020, pp. 105-107). Simultaneously, anti-immigration policies and border securitisation in Denmark have intensified, along with contemporary concerns of human trafficking, national security, and social cohesion (Siim & Borchorst, 2010, pp. 139-141).

This thesis examines how migrant sex workers are regulated and conceptualised by the Danish state. Particularly, this thesis is concerned with the ways in which Danish immigration policies impact and interact with the regulation of migrant sex workers. Denmark is a particularly interesting case for the following reasons. First, selling and buying sexual services has been legal since 1999 (Dyrvig et al., 2020, p. 22). Additionally, Denmark is known for having one of the most restrictive immigration regimes in Europe, impacting the rights, mobility, and working conditions of migrants (Siim & Borchorst, 2010, p. 140). Most migrant sex workers in Denmark are undocumented migrants, working without permit, residence, or citizenship (Plambech, 2023). This situates migrant sex workers at the intersection between different and intersecting forms of regulation within the policy fields of immigration, sex work regulation, and anti-trafficking.

## 1.1 Definition of Concepts

I recognise the power of language, and how framing may reproduce negative stereotypes or assumptions. Therefore, I use the terms ‘sex work’ and ‘migrant sex workers’ to refer to migrants selling sex in Denmark. I use these concepts with the intention to recognise their migratory trajectories and the aspect of work, thereby, acknowledging the agency of migrant sex workers and their position as labour migrants. The concept of sex work is not limited to a certain gender identity, sexuality, or ethnicity. However, in this thesis, I focus specifically on migrant women selling sex in Denmark. To further my analysis, the concepts of ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’, developed by Nicholas de Genova (2002), are employed to problematise and critically examine the language of the Danish state as utilised in policies and political statements. Hence, these concepts are not used with the intention to reproduce policy-oriented language or categorisations. I will return to these concepts in the theoretical section.

## 1.2 Research Aim and Question

The aim of the present thesis is to provide a nuanced and critical analysis of the regulation of migrant sex work in Denmark, with specific emphasis on the tension between sex work regulation and migratory restrictions. Particularly, I am concerned with how sex work regulation and immigration policies interact and conceptualise migrant sex workers. Thus, the overarching aim is to offer a complex understanding of migrant sex workers that goes beyond the trafficking framework and, thereby, drawing attention to how different and interacting policies impact the precarity and vulnerability of migrant sex workers. In this way, this thesis aims to contribute to the field through providing valuable insights into the interlocking policies that contribute to the framing and regulation of migrant sex workers. I want to emphasise that the intention of this thesis is not to undermine the vulnerabilities or obstacles that migrant sex workers may face, but rather to offer a critical and multifaceted perspective on their framing and regulation as conceptualised by the Danish state.

The thesis will be guided by the following research question:

*How do immigration policies intersect with the conceptualisation and regulation of migrant sex work in Denmark?*

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Sex Work Regulation in Denmark

In Denmark, buying and selling sexual services has been legalised since 1999. However, organising or profiting from commercial sex as a third party – such as procuring or including others to sell sex – is criminalised (Dyrvig et al., 2020, pp. 22-23). The legality of sex work implies that the person selling sex has legal residence in Denmark and are the age of 18 or older. Everyone who sells sex must register as self-employed and are therefore obligated to pay taxes. However, sex work is not legally recognised as a profession or legitimate field of employment. In practice, this means that sex workers lack the ability to assert labour rights and access social protections (Gender Equality Committee, 2019B, pp. 5-7). This legal framework is commonly referred to as a ‘legal grey area’ in political and public debates, referring to the fact that the law neither fully criminalises nor decriminalises sex work (Dyrvig et al., 2020, p. 3). Critics argue that the current legal framework of sex work makes the working conditions for sex workers more precarious, thereby, increasing their vulnerability to criminal networks, exploitation, and violence (SIO, 2024).

In 2019, the Danish Government established an inter-ministerial working group with the aim of clarifying the legal framework for sex work to create more balance between rights and duties in the field. Additionally, the aim was to ensure a rights-based approach to sex work, creating a safer working environment for people selling sexual services (Ministry of Children and Social Affairs, 2019, pp. 1-3). However, when shifting governments in 2019, the new government decided to abolish the working group, and changed their policy strategy towards exit-oriented policies to prevent and facilitate the exit of women from sex work. This political development sparked a public and political debate across the political spectrum and civil society organisations (Information 2019; Politiken, 2019).

Migrants are estimated to comprise 60-90% of sex workers in Europe (Vuolajärvi, 2019). Although sex work is legal in Denmark, migrant sex workers are often regulated through immigration policies and anti-trafficking interventions. The majority of migrant sex workers in Denmark are undocumented, situating them at the intersection of dual – and often incoherent

– policies of rescue, criminalisation, and deportation (Plambech, 2023). The rights of migrant sex workers are determined by their country of origin and their residence status. In public and political discourses, migrants selling sex are often conflated with victims of human trafficking (Spanger, 2023).

## 2.2 Danish Immigration Policy

Since the 1990s, Denmark has witnessed an increased immigration of third country nationals outside of the European Union (EU), fostering public and political debates on citizenship and belonging. In 2002, Denmark moved from an open to adopting one of the most restrictive immigration regimes in Europe (Siim and Borchorst, 2010, p. 134). This political development impacted the rights, mobility, and duties of migrants. In recent years, the political rhetoric has constructed migrants and non-citizens as ‘threats’ against the Danish welfare state, gender equality norms, and national security. This anti-immigration discourse reflects a paradox in which migrants and non-citizens are constructed as both a resource to fulfil economic and labour market interests while, at the same time, being conceptualised as a threat to the national community (Plambech et al., 2022, pp. 139-140).

Being undocumented, migrants are situated in a precarious position outside of the spheres of the legal system. The Danish regulation of migrant sex work relies on UN’s definition of human trafficking ratified in the Palermo Protocol (Retsinfo., 2024). Since 2002, the Danish Government has launched six action plans to combat human trafficking, relying on the assumption that migrant sex workers are victims of trafficking in need of rescue (Spanger, 2023; The Danish Government, 2022, p. 5). Migrant sex workers are either subject to ‘voluntary return’ or forced deportation, determined by whether these women are identified as victims of trafficking or as guilty of violating the Aliens Act (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019). Thus, the aspect of deportation is central in the management and regulation of migrant sex workers (Plambech, 2023). Previous research has shown how the lack of legal presence and rights impact the precarity and vulnerability of undocumented migrants, increasing the possibility of being exposed to precarious working conditions (de Genova, 2002; Sager, 2011, pp. 136-137).

### 3. Previous Studies

This thesis is situated at the intersection between the fields of sex work studies and critical migration studies. The following section reviews the current state of research on the topic of migrant sex work. The literature has been selected to offer insights into how migrant sex workers are subject to various immigration practices and border controls, which are often overlooked in sex work studies.

#### 3.1 Critical Migration Studies

This section reviews previous studies in the field of critical migration studies, with the aim of identifying the interconnections between critical migration studies and sex work migration. Bastia and Haagsman (2020) critically examine the conceptualisation of ‘the vulnerable female migrant’ in migration scholarship and political discourses, offering a broader transnational understanding of female migration that emphasises their agency and decision-making authority. In this way, the study goes beyond the trafficking framework through situating migrant sex work within a broader pattern, intertwined with global structures and women’s roles as development agents. Adopting this global gaze, I recognise migrant sex workers within this migration-development framework. I argue that the factors of global inequality, poverty, and neoliberal globalisation contribute to this field and offer a nuanced perspective on women’s motives for migrating, incorporating their roles as mothers, daughters, and decision-makers.

Previous studies show how anti-trafficking interventions often are accompanied by or take the form of anti-immigration interventions and border controls where victims are rescued through deportation (Andrijasevic, 2010; Baye & Heumann, 2014; Plambech 2014; Vuolajärvi, 2019). Andrijasevic (2010) argues that the anti-trafficking agenda in the EU aims to rescue victims of trafficking while, at the same time, approach the very same migrants as ‘illegal’ through border controls and migratory restrictions (pp. 42-45). These anti-trafficking measures rely on the assumption that trafficking is orchestrated by criminal networks who coerce and manipulate women into selling sex. The implication is that when facilitated by third parties, women’s migration is portrayed as being non-consensual and women are categorised as ‘victims’ in need



of rescue. Other studies have shown how the coexistence of anti-immigration policies, border controls, and anti-trafficking interventions in Europe have increased migrants' dependency on risky channels and criminal networks that facilitate border crossing, delimiting female migrants' mobility (Bastia & Haagsman, 2020; Baye & Heumann, 2014). These studies show how the political desire to both rescue victims and target 'illegal' migrants generates an incoherence between anti-immigration policies, anti-trafficking interventions, and humanitarian agendas. I argue that the institutional and discursive emphasis on vulnerability overlooks the complexity of women's migratory trajectories and the restrictions that they face. This tendency underlines the need to re-conceptualise migrant sex workers as active decision makers, development agents, and labour migrants.

A growing number of studies document how the so-called 'rescue industry' generates gendered stereotypes of the ideal trafficking victim (Andrijasevic, 2010; FitzGerald, 2016; Kaye et al., 2022; Plambech, 2014). These legal and policy-oriented categorisations situate migrant sex workers in the nexus between being viewed as 'victims' or 'illegal' migrants. These binary categorisations fail to capture the complexity of positions occupied by migrants selling sex. I argue that these dichotomies not only simplify the complex structures of migration, but also overlook the institutional framework that shapes these structures. In relation to this, de Genova (2002) and Griffiths (2015) engage in the political and legal practice of categorising migrants as 'illegal' and non-belonging. Griffiths (2015) argues that political discourses and state practices conceptualise and construct migrants as 'illegal criminals', 'illegal aliens' and as 'others' who threaten the boundaries and security of nations. In this way, migrants are discursively constructed as threat to the national community in both the embodied and conceptual sense. These studies demonstrate the power of language and discourses, highlighting the intersections between governmental conceptualisations and legal practices.

### 3.2 Sex Work Studies

The following section reviews studies in the field of sex work. This field is largely composed of ethnographic fieldwork studies, providing valuable insights into the subjective experiences of sex workers. However, migrants selling sex persist to be an understudied group in the field.

Through long-term ethnographic fieldwork in migrant communities in Denmark, Nigeria, Thailand, and Italy, Sine Plambech is recognised as one of the main contributors to the field. Developing the term ‘indentured sex work migration’ as a corrective to the narrative on sex trafficking, Plambech (2023) provides insights into how debt, deportability, and anti-immigration interventions shape the experiences and obstacles faced by migrant sex workers in Denmark and Europe. In this way, the study not only draws attention to the complex web of structures that shape migrant women’s decision to migrate and sell sex, but also the obstacles they face in their migratory journeys. The restrictions of European border controls have made it increasingly expensive for undocumented migrants to cross borders, resulting in increased debt to criminal networks that facilitate border crossing. This pattern fosters a state of indenture, where migrant women agree to work to pay off the debt. In this way, ‘indentured sex work migration’ raises complex questions of the web of arrangements that complicate the distinction between ‘victims’ and ‘criminals’.

Epistemologically, Plambech’s use of ‘indentured sex work migration’ serves as a critical concept, challenging dominant narratives on trafficking and vulnerability. Through situating migrant sex work in a broader global pattern, the term encourages a more nuanced understanding of the interlocking factors that impact the decision and trajectory of migrants selling sex; “*Seen from that perspective, the women are not just victims but also decisionmakers who, despite having limited opportunities, manoeuvre through various challenges in their search for a form of livelihood and security in their lives.*” (Plambech 2023, p. 589). Adopting this global gaze, along with the factors of global inequality, globalisation, and capitalism, migrant sex workers are not limited to being vulnerable, passive victims, but rather recognised as active decision makers, development agents, and mothers.

Most scholarship suggests that anti-immigration interventions, border enforcement, and police generate fear and uncertainty among undocumented migrants. For migrant sex workers, this fear has been linked to a reluctance to report rapes, assaults, and violence due to the threat of being fined, detained, or deported (Baye & Heumann, 2014; Plambech, 2023). This pattern situates migrant sex workers at the intersection between a political desire to both rescue, deport, and criminalise undocumented migrants, reflecting the incoherence between anti-immigration policies and humanitarian ‘rescue’ agendas (Plambech et al., 2022, pp. 148-149; Spanger,

2023; Vuolajärvi, 2019). This tendency stresses the need for adding a broader perspective on the topic, incorporating not only global factors and motives of migrant sex workers, but also the impacts of border controls and anti-immigration interventions that shape their trajectories.

A body of studies documents how the rescue industry and growing concerns of trafficking foster gendered assumptions of the ideal trafficking victim, relying on images of female migrants as vulnerable victims (Spanger, 2023). Simultaneously, discourses of gendered moralities about sex work and gender equality have been rising, raising complex dilemmas on ethical practises and gender equality norms. This vulnerability discourse has been argued to delimit discussions of human rights and citizenship, legitimising increased forms of governmental control of borders, migration flows, and women's bodies (Bernstein et al., 2022, pp. 126-128; FitzGerald, 2016; Kaye et al., 2022, pp. 71-73).

Other studies investigate the interlinkages between anti-trafficking policies and the fostering of anti-immigration and anti-prostitution discourses across Europe (Baye & Heumann, 2014; Bernstein et al., 2022; Vuolajärvi, 2019). Consequently, migrant sex workers are conceptualised as vulnerable victims, which not only undermine their agency but also silence their struggles of mobility, inequality, and protection. I argue that these binary categorisations simplify and naturalise complex structures of migration, while also concealing the role of governmental practices in shaping these structures.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 Migrant 'Illegality' and 'Deportability'

The insecurity produced by the irregular status of undocumented migrants has been conceptualised by anthropologist Nicholas de Genova (2002) as 'deportability'. The concept of deportability refers to the risk and possibility of being subject to deportation, and the ways in which the presence of this possibility shapes the position occupied by migrants. Adopting this narrative, deportability is understood as a social condition that impacts and shapes all aspects of migrants' lives, identities, and vulnerabilities. In this sense, deportability emphasises

that regardless of whether deportation actually occurs, the risk of being deported is omnipresent, shaping the ways in which migrants' organise their everyday lives and movements (Sager, 2016). Thus, deportability not only refers to the legal mechanisms of deportation, but also encompasses the ways in which deportability shapes the lives and precarity of migrants without legal recognition or residence. De Genova (2002) employs the concept in relation to how immigration policies intersect with policies and practices in other policy fields, and how these interlocking policies contribute to increased precarity and vulnerability of migrants. The notion of being 'deportable' relies on a socio-political deportation regime that constructs and reinforces ideas of nationalism, statehood, citizenship, and race. Building on this, Sager (2011) adds a feminist dimension to the concept through exploring the gendered production of deportability. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the study shows how undocumented migrants in Sweden are caught between polarised representations, being characterised as either 'victims' or 'criminals', shaped by a complex interaction between different policy fields and gendered representations of migrants (pp. 137-141).

The concept of deportability is closely tied to the theoretical concept of migrant 'illegality'. De Genova (2002) conceptualises 'illegality' as a social condition produced by the ways in which migrants are subject to 'othering' by immigration laws and political actors within nation spaces. From this perspective, the production of 'illegality' and 'deportability' are produced by governmental and legal practices and serves as a tool to legitimise and reproduce anti-immigration policies and othering of noncitizens: "*Migrant "illegality" is produced as an effect of the law, but is also sustained as an effect of a discursive formation.*" (de Genova, 2002, p. 431). The spatialised aspect of 'illegality' reinforces the physical borders and boundaries of nation-states in everyday life and is, thereby, linked to the vulnerability and deportability of migrants. From this understanding, migrant 'illegality' reflects first and foremost a legal constructed category, reproduced through various policies and institutional practices. In this thesis, the Danish Aliens Act, passed by the Danish Parliament in February 2019, is understood as a law that produces and reinforces 'illegality' and 'deportability' through criminalising the unregistered presence of undocumented migrants (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019). Additionally, Danish immigration policies commonly refer to undocumented migrants as 'illegal migrants' (Ministry of Justice, 2014, pp. 1-5; The Danish Government, 2016, p. 5). Adopting this perspective, migrant sex workers are constructed as 'deportable objects' due to

their undocumented residential status and lack of working permit (Plambech 2023). Hence, the Danish immigration law, similar to the findings theorised by de Genova (2002), produces its subjects through constructing differential and uneven social entities and rights of people in society.

Other scholars have employed ‘deportability’ and ‘illegality’ to build on feminist approaches to provide insights into how ‘deportability’ is experienced by undocumented migrants, and how these experiences are related to gender, immigration policies, and social policies (Plambech, 2023; Sager, 2016; Vuolajärvi, 2019). Plambech (2023) employs these theoretical concepts to examine how undocumented migrant sex workers navigate deportability and its effects. The article sheds light on the complex intersections between debt and deportability, and how situating the topic of migrant sex work in a broader global perspective is crucial in studies of contemporary women’s migration.

Inspired by Plambech (2023), I draw inspiration from the corners of her study through analysing the legal and political constructions of vulnerability and criminalisation of migrant sex work, produced by their regulation and situatedness in different and interacting policy fields. I understand the concepts of ‘deportability’ and ‘illegality’ as categorisations and social conditions generated by states as a way to control the movement and mobility of people within boundaries of nation spaces. In this thesis, I employ these theoretical notions to build on these feminist approaches with the intention to provide insights into how ‘deportability’ and ‘illegality’ are generated by interacting policies of immigration, sex work regulation, and anti-trafficking measures. In this way, the concepts are used as analytical themes throughout the analysis to examine how the production of ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’ is constructed by the Danish state.

## 4.2 What’s the Problem Represented to Be?

Inspired by these theoretical notions, I draw on feminist scholar Carol Bacchi’s approach ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) to guide my analysis and answer my research question. In this way, I use the WPR approach as a theoretical lens to critically scrutinise how

migrant sex work is problematised and regulated in the different and intersecting policies that govern them. Bacchi's WPR approach serves as both a theoretical framework and methodological approach for critical policy analysis that seeks to reveal the underlying logics and assumptions of policies. Resting on the premise that all policies and policy proposals rely upon presumed problems, the approach offers a framework to reveal the 'unexamined ways of thinking' that are embedded in the policies that govern society. Central to the approach is that we are governed through problematisations, rather than through policies. The critical focus of the approach is, therefore, to examine these problematisations and the problem representations they rely upon. Hence, the WPR approach offers a framework to examine how problem representations rely on presumed 'problems', shaped by dominant ideologies, practices, and historical contexts (Bacchi, 2009, p. 189).

Drawing on Foucault's understanding of power and governmentality, the approach builds on three main propositions: 1) we are governed through problematisations, 2) we need to study problematisations rather than 'problems', and 3) we need to interrogate problematisations through exploring the premises and effects of the problem representations they rely on (Bacchi, 2009, pp. 25-27). Adopting this perspective, policies produce subjects which form society and the perceptions of people within it, reflecting relations of power (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, pp. 29-31). In the context of migrant sex work, the approach offers a valuable tool to analyse the underlying logics embedded in the policy fields and problem representation of migrant sex.

The thinking offered by Bacchi allows for a critical interrogation of taken-for-granted assumptions, and dominant structures of power embedded, produced, and reinforced through governmental discourses and policies. In line with Bacchi, I understand a policy field as a complex web of power relations, practices, and articulations. I employ the WPR approach as both a theoretical and methodological framework to analyse how 'deportability' and 'illegality' are produced as effects by the representation of migrant sex work, and as conceptualised and regulated by the Danish state.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Research Design and Method

The following section introduces the research design and use of qualitative content analysis. This thesis is designed as a qualitative study, aiming to provide insights into how migrant sex workers in Denmark are impacted by different policies of immigration and sex work regulation. This research design has not been chosen to generalise findings, but rather to provide insights into how interacting policies shape the conceptualisation and regulation of migrant sex workers in Denmark.

This thesis employs qualitative content analysis as the methodological framework for empirical analysis. Content analysis has been defined in various ways and is used in both quantitative and qualitative studies. In some fields, content analysis is used quantitatively to examine how many times a certain content occurs. In qualitative contexts, content analysis is used to examine written documents, including newspaper articles, reports, books, and journals. More recently, the material available for content analysis has extended from solely written to non-written data, such as radio programmes, photography, and films (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pp. 349-352). Qualitative content analysis is specifically well-suited to reveal and interrogate meanings and understandings within different forms of material through identifying categories or themes (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, pp. 86-90).

Content analysis allows for a comprehensive analysis of different forms of documents, providing a framework to capture the multifaceted policy landscape that migrant sex workers are situated in. Therefore, this method was chosen to offer a broader analysis, allowing me to answer my research question based on different forms of policy-related material. Guided by Bacchi's WPR approach, I employ content analysis to analyse different forms of policy documents and political statements. The analysis will be structured by the proposed questions of the WPR approach (Appendix I), identifying the problem representation of migrant sex work, and the underlying assumptions, silences, and effects of this representation.

## 5.2. Material and Data Collection

The data collection process is based on desk-based data collection. Specifically, this thesis is based upon an analysis of 16 Danish policy documents, including national action plans, policy proposals, political statements, and parliamentary questions during the period of 2014-2024 (Appendix II). Additionally, two newspaper articles citing members of the Danish Government were selected to provide a broader understanding of the conceptualisations provided by the standpoint of the Danish state. The documents cover sex work, migration, and trafficking, and have been carefully selected to answer my research question. These documents were collected from the Danish Parliament's website, relevant ministries, and the website of the Danish Government, ensuring a comprehensive overview of the policy landscape.

The data collection process has focused on identifying and selecting data from the standpoint of the Danish state. Therefore, the starting point of the process began with identifying relevant material from the official website of the Danish Parliament, The Danish Government, and relevant ministries to select official governmental documents, policy proposals, and actions plans relevant for the legal regulation and conceptualisation of migrant sex work. Together, these political documents reflect the development of the policy intention of the Danish state.

It has been crucial for the data collection process to acknowledge and question whose voice is heard in any policy-related documents. Policy documents are written with a certain purpose or objective, which allows for biases. I acknowledge that policy documents reflect the voice of those who formulate it and, therefore, reflect a certain objective. Moreover, I recognise my own role in the data collection process. The selection of policy documents is an interpretive process in which the choice of data is determined and influenced by the researcher's own interests and knowledge of a topic (Robson & McCartan, p. 353). Hence, acknowledging my own positionality and being explicit about the theoretical notions I use to interpret my material has been central for the analytical process.



## 5.3 Translation

The process of collecting data from Danish websites allows for possible limitations and translation biases. In addition, all quotations used in the analytical section are my own translations. However, as a native Danish speaker and after three years of higher education in English, I believe that my language skills are of a level that allows for a translation from Danish to English confidently. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the possible risks and biases that translation and interpretation might allow for. When in doubt, I have employed English-Danish dictionaries to ensure the most accurate translation.

## 5.4. Limitations

Content analysis is often used as a secondary or supplementary method within social science research (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 352). Therefore, adopting content analysis as the primary and only method may possess challenges or limitations. However, due to the scope and time constraints of this paper, content analysis rather than discourse analysis was chosen as the method for this thesis. Moreover, content analysis may risk being less systematic than other methods due to the flexibility and variation of different forms of written and non-written data. Thus, it is crucial to be systematic and consider the research question and aims of the study consistently throughout each step of the research process.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the central instrument in the research process and, thus, part of the knowledge construction process. Therefore, subjectivity and biases of the researcher may pose significant limitations (Scheyvens, 2014, pp. 60-61). Adopting the assumption that problem representations impact our conceptual sense of reality, the process of collecting and interpreting data is subject to the researcher's own perception and knowledge (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19). I acknowledge these limitations and aim for an objective standpoint through practising reflexivity throughout the research process. To raise critical awareness, I consistently reflect upon my own positionality, internalised biases, and norms through writing reflections and having conversations with others throughout the research process. As mentioned in the data collection section, I recognise my own role in collecting data for analysis, and how the selection

of policy documents is impacted by the researchers own interests and knowledge on a topic (Robson and & McCartan, p. 353).

Moreover, I acknowledge that migrant sex workers in Denmark are situated and impacted differently by immigration practices due to intersectional inequalities. However, due to the time frame and scope of this thesis, I chose not to account for intersectional factors in my analysis. I do, however, recognise that the construction of ‘deportability’ and migrant ‘illegality’ impacts migrant sex workers differently based on aspects of citizenship, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality.

## 5.5 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, various ethical considerations have been faced. One of them being the lack of direct involvement with migrant sex workers. Through careful consideration, I decided not to conduct interviews or other forms of direct involvement with migrant sex workers due to the risk of contributing to the vulnerability of an already precarious group in Danish society (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pp. 208-211). This has led to various reflections on the complexities of examining a vulnerable group in society, and how to conduct meaningful research without exposing or contributing to increased marginalisation, vulnerability or stigmatisation through language and framing. Hence, I recognise the power of language, and how reproducing certain policy categorisations and language may reinforce negative stereotypes or assumptions.

## 5.6 Data Analysis

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, I draw on Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach to guide my analysis. The approach serves as a bridge between a theoretical framework and a methodological approach, which I use as a lens to analyse how the policy fields of immigration policies and sex work regulation is established by different problem representations of migrant sex workers. I specifically focus on how the Danish state constructs ‘deportability’, ‘illegality’,

and vulnerability of migrant sex workers in policy representations, practices, and through language.

Drawing on poststructuralist thinking offered by Bacchi (2009), I employ the logics and questions of the WPR approach to critically examine the underlying assumptions and power structures that shape the representation of migrant sex work. Although the analysis does not analyse the framing of migrant sex work in one specific policy, as the WPR approach suggests, I adopt this way of thinking to analyse the general conceptualisation of migrant sex work in different policies and practices. In this way, I aim to examine how migrant sex work is constructed as a ‘problem’ and how this is represented in various institutional and policy-related conceptualisations. Throughout the analysis, I focus on how migrant sex workers are constructed as either ‘vulnerable victims’ or problematised as ‘illegal’ migrants. The concepts of ‘deportability’ and ‘illegality’, developed by de Genova (2002), are used as analytical themes to illustrate how the framing and regulation of migrant sex workers intersect with broader development agendas and political discussions on migration, border control, and national security.

The approach proposes six questions that can be applied to problem representations to examine the ‘problem’ implied in a given policy or rule (Appendix I). To answer my research question, four of Bacchi’s proposed questions enable me to analyse how migrant sex work are conceptualised and regulated by the Danish state. Additionally, the questions allow me to critically analyse the idea that the policy fields governing migrant sex work are internally coherent and consistent. Drawing on questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the WPR approach, the following questions will guide my analysis:

1. What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in the political conceptualisations and policies regulating migrant sex work?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of migrant sex work?
3. What is left unproblematic in this representation of migrant sex work? What are the silences?
4. What effects are produced by this representation of migrant sex work in relation to the concepts of migrant ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’?

## 6. Analysis

In the section below, I adopt the methodological lens of the WPR approach to analyse how migrant sex workers are constructed as a ‘problem’ by the Danish state through their situatedness in different and intersecting policy fields. The approach allows me to analyse how this problem representation relates to the regulation of migrant sex work. In this way, I use the approach to analyse how anti-immigration policies intersect with the regulation of migrant sex work through their conceptualisation. Additionally, I adopt the concepts provided by de Genova (2002) to add a critical gaze on how the ‘problem’ of migrant sex work constructs ‘deportability’ and migrant ‘illegality’. To support my findings, I draw on pre-existing studies on the topic (Plambech, 2014; Plambech, 2023; Spanger, 2023).

### 6.1 What’s the Problem Represented to Be?

In this section, I analyse how anti-immigration policies, sex work regulation, and anti-trafficking policies conceptualise and construct migrant sex workers as a ‘problem’, based on the first question of the WPR approach (Appendix I).

Although buying and selling sex in Denmark is legalised, sex work is commonly being described as a ‘social problem’ that is non-belonging within a welfare society (Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior, 2020). Additionally, the former Minister for Social Affairs and the Interior, Astrid Krag, has referred to sex work as a field that constitutes “a hole in our welfare society” (Politiken, 2019) and as a social problem:

*“I must be honest today and say that I used to be among those who once believed that sex purchase should be criminalised. Because I believed, and by the way still believe, that prostitution is so harmful for people that it does not belong in a welfare society like the Danish one.”* (Gender Equality Committee, 2019A, 9:55.00-10:09.00, my translation).

*“Fundamentally, the current government views prostitution as a social problem that has significant harmful effects on individuals both physically and mentally.”* (The Danish Parliament, 2021, p. 2, my translation).

In these statements, sex work is utilised as a ‘problem’ that interferes with welfare society. These statements further illustrate how sex work is presented not only as a problem for the person selling sex, but also as a threat to the norms and values of a welfare society. In this way, sex work is problematised through rhetorically constructing a conflict between sex work and the boundaries and values of the welfare state. Through emphasising the welfare state, sex workers are discursively constructed as ‘others’ who are non-belonging and less entitled to the benefits and protections that the welfare state offers. Adopting this narrative, the access to welfare becomes an argument that maintains and legitimises policies that aim to prevent, criminalise, or rescue women out of the industry. This situates sex workers in a complex web of policies, which on one hand, legalise and position sex work as a form of employment subject to pay taxes but, on the other hand, denies sex workers access to social and health-related rights and benefits. Commonly referred to as a ‘legal grey zone’, this regulation denies rights and protections of the welfare state to sex workers who economically contribute through taxes (Gender Equality Committee, 2019B, pp. 9-12; The Social Affairs and Senior Citizens’ Committee, 2021, p. 38).

For migrant sex workers, ‘the problem’ is not only that they are selling sex, but also their presence in society that discursively and legally constructs them as ‘others’, who threaten society in terms of their unregistered presence. The governmental construction of undocumented migrants as a ‘problem’ is present in the Aliens Act, which criminalises the presence of undocumented migrants without residence permit (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019). Additionally, a report issued by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration states that third-country nationals working illegally in Denmark are subject to immediate deportation (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2023, p. 49). In practice, this means that migrant sex workers are regulated by immigration policies, particularly undocumented migrant sex workers, due to their lack of working and residence permits. This situates migrant sex workers at the intersection of different policies of sex work regulation and immigration policies. Moreover, migrants without legal residence are commonly categorised as ‘illegal’, as

opposed to ‘undocumented’ or ‘unregistered’, situating them outside of the law (Ministry of Justice, 2014, p. 5; The Danish Government, 2016, p. 5). Adopting the concepts of migrant ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’, undocumented migrants are conceptualised as a threat to national security and boundaries, constructing them as ‘deportable objects’ who are non-belonging within the Danish welfare society. This discursive logic reflects the boundaries of the welfare state in the sense that the entitlement and access to rights and protection is based upon the premise of national citizenship and labour market participation within the formal spheres of the economy.

The ‘othering’ of migrant sex workers is not only limited to their status as undocumented migrants, but also their occupation as sex workers, which poses a threat to the gendered moralities and gender equality norms that the Danish welfare state relies upon. Migrants selling sex are almost invisible in political debates on sex work, and predominately defined in terms of their legal and policy-oriented categorisation; as victims of human trafficking, or as ‘illegal’ migrants, who reside unregistered. This conceptualisation is present in the three latest national action plans to combat human trafficking, and in governmental reports targeting ‘illegal’ migration (Ministry of Justice, 2014, pp. 5-10; The Danish Government, 2015; 2019; 2022).

*“Human trafficking is a global problem where cynical traffickers exploit vulnerable human beings’ search for a better livelihood in Denmark”* (The Danish Government, 2022, p. 5, my translation)

This statement highlights the tendency to victimise migrant sex workers as vulnerable victims who are exploited or coerced into selling sex. This conceptualisation is a recurrent theme present in the national action plans. The conflation of migrants selling sex with victims of trafficking has transcended the discourse of sex work, from being concerned with a criminalisation versus decriminalisation framework, to global concerns of trafficking and ‘illegal’ flows of migration (Spanger, 2023). As a result, migrants selling sex are predominantly represented as trafficked victims and rarely as sex workers or labour migrants. For this reason, the political discourse on migrant sex work appears to be divided in conflicting dichotomies: the victim of human trafficking, worthy of rescue and assistance, or the criminalised ‘other’, defined by their unregistered border crossing, risking deportation. As a result, migrant sex

workers and their regulation are determined by their legal status. I argue that these binary categorisations conceal the voices and trajectories of migrant sex workers, while constructing them as a ‘problem’ in both the embodied and conceptual sense.

## 6.2 What Presuppositions or Assumptions Underlie This Representation?

The following section contains an analysis based on the second WPR question (Appendix I). As discussed in the previous section, migrants selling sexual services are predominantly defined by their legal and documental status. For this reason, migrant sex workers are caught in binary and conflicting categorisations; as vulnerable victims or criminalised as ‘others’, who constitute a problem in society. These categorisations reflect assumptions of migrant sex workers as trafficked, coerced victims, while also revealing gendered assumptions about victimhood and agency of migrant women. The discursive construction of sex work as a social problem and as constituting a “hole in Danish society” (Politiken, 2019), further reflects gendered moralities about sex work and women’s rights, and the boundaries of protection and entitlements of the welfare state.

*“Prostitution is fundamentally raw exploitation of women, who most often are there out of necessity rather than desire. It is not coincidental that the ‘the happy hooker’ always is referred to in the singular”* (Information, 2021, my translation)

This quote, utilised by the former Minister for Social Affairs and the Interior, Astrid Krag, reflects both gendered and victimised assumptions of sex workers as vulnerable, exploited, and as passive in their decision-making capacity. Through this language, sex work is being constructed as a problem of exploitation, reflecting underlying assumptions of perceived vulnerability and victimisation of women selling sexual services. The quote further suggests that sex workers lack agency and are exploited and coerced into selling sex. Adopting the poststructuralist thinking offered by Bacchi (2009), this narrative shapes the policy responses and societal attitudes towards sex work, while reproducing gendered and victimising assumptions. The representation of ‘the happy hooker’ being referred to in the singular reveals

assumptions of a homogenised portrayal of women's experiences in selling sex. I argue that this representation fosters presuppositions that overlook the diversity of experiences faced by migrant sex workers, while also diverting attention from the broader global factors, such as poverty and global inequality, which impact the motives of migrant sex workers. Additionally, the quote raises questions about whose voice and perspective are included and those excluded in defining the problem.

*“There are women and men who sell sex for shorter or longer periods during their lives, without having any social or health related problems, and then there is a group of foreign and Danish street-based women, with significant social and health related problems, including drug addiction. A majority of the foreign women are also victims of human trafficking”* (The Gender Equality Committee, 2019B, my translation).

This statement underlines the rhetoric distance between the categories of ‘women and men’ who sell sex and ‘foreign and street-based women’, who are mentioned in relation to social and health related problems. This representation of migrant sex workers constructs migrants selling sex as a ‘problem’ – not only in terms of the social and health related consequences that they might face – but also as a societal problem that constitutes a risk to national security, crime, and borders. Moreover, this utilisation of migrant sex workers relies on the assumption that migrant sex workers are victims of exploitation and criminal networks while, at the same time, are embodied as a threat due to their ‘illegal’ presence in Danish society. These representations of women selling sexual services legitimise policies and national action plans that seek to limit, prevent, or rescue sex workers. Through emphasising and creating a figure of sex workers as ‘vulnerable victims’, the Danish state legitimates political interventions that aim to ‘rescue’ women out of the industry. Within this narrative, migrant ‘illegality’ is produced by the presence of undocumented migrants and through constructing migrant sex work as a social problem.

*“Victims of human trafficking are vulnerable people who often live in an interdependent relationship with their traffickers under threats against them or their families.”* (The Danish Government, 2019, p. 5, my translation)



This statement, present in the national action plan from 2019, conceptualise migrant sex workers as inherently passive in their migratory journeys through portraying them as subjects of criminal networks. The discursive emphasis on the ‘interdependent relationship’ with traffickers reproduces the idea that migrant women lack the agency and capacity to navigate their position. The recurrent emphasis on trafficking fosters and reproduces the role of the Danish state as a national protector whose role is to maintain social order and security through increasing border controls, migratory restrictions, and deportations. These assumptions further uphold the role and value of borders in maintaining stability and security of the national community, while legitimising policies that seek to reinforce the defence and enforcement of borders. Moreover, the emphasis on victimisation and vulnerability reinforces policies that aim to ‘rescue’ migrant sex workers, neglecting the global underlying factors of migrant sex work and their lack of rights in Danish society. The views present in the action plans to combat human trafficking is recognised as part of the ‘rescue industry’, which reproduce governmental agendas of migratory restrictions, border controls, and police enforcement. I argue that these policies highlight dominant narratives of victimhood, vulnerability, and migrant ‘illegality’, while neglecting the voices, motives, and rights of migrant sex workers.

### 6.3 What Is Left Unproblematic in This Representation?

The following section contains an analysis based on the fourth question of the WPR approach (Appendix I). In this section, I critically analyse and bring forward the ‘silences’ that these representations of migrant sex workers fail to capture. As established in the previous section, migrant sex workers are predominantly conceptualised and regulated based on their legal and residential status, and whether they are characterised as victims of trafficking.

When I began the process of collecting material for analysis, I noticed that migrant sex workers almost are invisible in official policy documents on sex work. In a report issued by the Danish Centre for Social Science Research, operating under the Ministry of the Interior and Health, migrant sex workers are almost absent, and predominantly referred to in relation to trafficking, exploitation, and vulnerability. Conversely, the language of ethnic Danish women selling sex are far more nuanced, disclosing a diversity of experiences and motives for selling sexual

services, including economic opportunities, control, and sexual desires (Dyrvig et al., 2020, pp. 11-15). This discursive pattern reflects both victimising assumptions of migrants selling sexual services, and the simplistic nature of the political debate surrounding them. I argue that this tendency silences the voices and experiences of migrant sex workers, leaving out their experiences, motives, and agency. Additionally, perspectives of the broader global structures and factors that shape the decision to migrate and sell sex is neglected in this representation.

As established in the section above, migrant women selling sex are commonly referred to as passive victims in their migratory trajectory. This emphasis on vulnerability and victimisation is argued to conceal the decisions and actions of migrant women, specifically in terms of their role in taking loans, arranging documents, transportations, and sending remittances to support the well-being of their families (Plambech, 2023). Building on previous studies in the field (Plambech, 2014; Plambech, 2023; Spanger, 2023), I argue that the role of migrant sex workers in sending remittances, supporting their families, and arranging their migratory journey is silenced in public and political debates on migrant sex work. The discursive emphasis on exploitation and trafficking fails to capture the broader global factors that contribute to the decision to migrate and sell sex, such as global inequality, poverty, and neoliberal globalisation, while also silencing the issues of labour rights, social protections, and migratory restrictions.

As representing the governmental standpoint on migration, the Danish Immigration Service plays a crucial role in shaping the discourse and policy-field that regulates migrant sex work. The national discourse on migration relies on the logic of human beings belonging to one national community. This logic is argued to naturalise and legitimise the articulations reflected in the national action plan to combat human trafficking, which describes how victims are rescued through being repatriated to their country of origin:

*“The work must focus on preventing people from being lured to the West by criminal networks, and to support victims of trafficking in repatriation.”* (The Danish Government, 2019, p. 15, my translation)

What is left unproblematic in this representation is the opportunity for victims to apply for residence and work permits. Given this simplistic representation, the agency and decision-

making capacity of migrant women is concealed and neglected. I argue that migrant women selling sex not only are victims of trafficking but have agency in respect of their migratory trajectories. The emphasis on migrant women being “lured to the West” and coerced into selling sex is argued to silence women’s motives and conditions for migrating. This victimising language fosters a narrative of migrant women as passive and easily coerced, which overlooks the global factors of poverty, global inequality, and lack of working conditions.

Previous studies show that many women who are identified as victims of trafficking began their journeys with an aspiration to become labour migrants. However, given their irregular route to Denmark without access to the formal labour market, many migrant women are left to work in informal sectors to repay their debt (Plambech, 2023). The lack of attention to migrant sex worker’s motives for migrating in the political spheres of society constructs a narrative of migrant women as less capable of making their own decisions in their migratory journey, while portraying them as naive and easily coerced. In contrast, men who are identified as victims of trafficking are predominantly characterised as exploited workers and represented within a human rights and workers’ rights framework (Social Services, 2021, pp. 9-10). This difference is argued to foster gendered differences between migrants, ascribing and reinforcing gendered assumptions of migrant women and ideas of victimhood.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on migrant sex work in Denmark, arguing that the distinction between ‘victims’ and ‘criminals’ often is difficult to identify and distinguish in practice. This results in uneven and opposing policy interventions which seem to both rescue victims of trafficking while, at the same time, target the very same migrants as ‘illegal’, making them subject to various forms of police enforcement and anti-immigration policies (Plambech, 2014; Spanger, 2023). Moreover, the uneven regulation of migrant sex work makes it difficult to distinguish between ‘voluntary’ as opposed to ‘involuntary’ sex work, which silences the precarity and vulnerability produced by anti-immigration practices. As discussed in previous sections, the corrective term ‘indentured sex-work migration’ as opposed to the narratives on ‘human trafficking’ provides a more complex perspective on the ways in which contemporary migrant labour is organised (Plambech, 2023). Adopting this concept, I argue that a broader global gaze, incorporating the aspects of debt, deportability, and border controls, adds a more nuanced and multi-faceted perspective on migrant sex workers.

This concept goes beyond the silences produced by the trafficking framework, which conceals the voices and obstacles experienced by migrant sex workers.

## 6.4 What Effects Are Produced by This Representation?

This section analyses which effects are produced by the representation of migrant sex workers as either ‘victims’ or ‘illegal’ migrants, as reflected in the different policies that govern them. Additionally, this section analyses how the conditions of migrant ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’ are produced by this conceptualisation and regulation of migrant sex work.

According to de Genova (2002), migrant ‘illegality’ is lived through a sense of ‘deportability’, possessing an omnipresent threat of being removed from the space of a nation. Therefore, migrant ‘illegality’ is recognised as a social condition, making undocumented migrants subject to various forms of enforcement, policing, and restrictions. The current regulation of migrant sex workers in Denmark entails that migrants selling sex are unable to obtain a working permit due to the criminalisation of procurement in the current sex work regulation (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2022, p. 1). This means that migrants selling are unable to obtain a residence and work permit due to their occupation as sex workers. In practice, this legal tension between immigration law and sex work regulation situates migrant sex workers in a ‘legal grey area’, forcing them in a state of ‘illegality’. This discursive practice leaves undocumented migrants legally vulnerable in the sense that they are positioned outside of the legal spheres of society. These aspects make it difficult to draw the line between ‘victims’ and ‘criminals’, as migrant sex workers who may be identified as victims of trafficking also are guilty of violating immigration law (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019).

Previous studies have shown how Danish Immigration law categorically categorises and conceptualises migrants as ‘undesirable’, subjecting migrant sex workers to a web of immigration penalties, interventions, and police enforcement, as well as detention and deportation (Plambech, 2023). The deportations of migrant sex workers are intertwined with the anti-trafficking ‘rescue industry’ in which the return of migrant women identified as trafficked victims either are voluntarily returned or subject to forced deportation.

*“Foreigners who came to Denmark as victims of human trafficking and who reside here illegally must leave the country. Victims of human trafficking are granted a longer deportation deadline – a so-called reflection period – of 30 days, granted by the Immigration service, which can be prolonged up to 120 days if special reasons occur or if the foreigner cooperates on a prepared return”* (The Danish Government, 2019, p. 12, my translation).

The distinction between ‘victims’ and ‘illegal’ migrants is difficult to navigate, reflected in the national action plan to combat human trafficking cited above. Given this representation, migrant sex workers are often caught in opposing policy regimes: one conceptualising sex work as a social problem that requires interventions; the other in which migrant women selling sex are seen as trafficked, requiring border enforcement and anti-immigration interventions. Previous studies have shown how migrant women selling sex have felt pressured to accept the assisted voluntary return programme under the threat of a forced deportation: *“Oftentimes, authorities would have labelled their experiences differently: return, repatriation, rejection or voluntary return. Yet the migrants called it and experienced it as deportation”* (Plambech, 2023, p. 590). As established in the previous sections, migrant sex workers are situated in a web of entangled policies of immigration law, anti-trafficking agendas, and sex work regulation. This makes it difficult to distinguish between ‘victims’ and ‘criminals’ – not only in terms of their experiences, but also in the ways in which they are returned. Besides blurring this distinction, women identified as either ‘victims’ or as ‘illegal’ migrants are regulated through the same measures. The difference, however, is whether the person is granted a longer period of departure. An implication with this difference is that the identification of ‘victims’ not only is difficult to identify in practice, but also that it relies upon homogenous and gendered assumptions about victimhood.

The presumption that Danish values, norms, and social cohesion are threatened by ‘other’ non-citizens legitimises migratory restrictions and border control embedded in nationalist thinking. In this way, migrants are portrayed as ‘illegal’ migrants and ‘others’ who threaten the community of value. This discursive and political formation constructs and reproduces the ‘illegality’ of migrants (de Genova, 2002). The construction of the figure of ‘the female victim of trafficking’ simultaneously legitimises rescue-oriented interventions, which rely on

victimising assumptions (Spanger, 2023). These narratives, embedded in the national action plans, have constructed a political awareness of the harmful effects of transnational commercial sex, while at the same, reinforcing the narrative of the vulnerable female migrant (The Danish Government, 2015; 2019; 2022). In this way, anti-immigration policies and anti-trafficking interventions are found to be an integrated part of the regulation of migrant sex work in Denmark.

As established in the previous analytical sections, migrant sex workers in Denmark are situated in a web of intersecting and incoherent policies of border controls, migratory restrictions, and anti-trafficking interventions. The situatedness of migrant sex workers in overlapping policy fields, aiming to both ‘rescue’ migrants selling sex and targeting them as ‘illegal’, leaves them in a state of precarity and uncertainty. I argue that the Danish state, through conceptualising migrant sex workers as ‘vulnerable victims’, legitimises different forms of policing and control, blurring the lines between ‘victims’ and ‘criminals’. Paradoxically, the current state of immigration policies positions the very same migrants as ‘illegal’, making them subject to various forms of enforcement. Given this representation, I argue that the Danish state, through their conceptualisation and regulation, leaves migrant sex workers in a state of ‘deportability’, outside of the legal spheres of society, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and uncertainty. In this way, migrant sex workers are constructed as ‘illegal’ defined by their unregistered legal presence in Danish society, while also being criminalised through the governmental construction of sex work as a ‘social problem’, relying on and invoking images of crime, exploitation, and victimhood.

## 7. Conclusion

As established in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to examine how migrant sex workers are conceptualised and regulated through different and interacting policies. Through qualitative content analysis, guided by Bacchi’s WPR approach, different policies, action plans, political statements, and policy proposals were analysed in relation to the concepts of ‘deportability’ and migrant ‘illegality’. The findings reveal that migrant sex workers, through their

situatedness in different and overlapping policy fields, are constructed and conceptualised as a ‘problem’ by the Danish state. In this way, migrant sex workers are regulated through anti-immigration policies, making them subject to various forms of police enforcement, migratory restrictions, and anti-trafficking interventions. Moreover, I argue that these different forms of regulation situate migrant sex workers in a state of ‘deportability’ and migrant ‘illegality’, leaving them outside of the legal spheres of society, and making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Additionally, the intersections between immigration policies and sex work regulation impacts the conceptualisation of migrant sex workers through constructing them as a ‘problem’ of both violating immigration law, and through the framing of sex work as a ‘social problem’. These different forms of control and policing blur the lines between ‘victims’ and ‘criminals’, revealing incoherence between humanitarian rescue agendas and anti-immigration policies in Denmark. I argue that these dichotomies, conceptualised by the Danish state, simplify the complex structures of migration and, thereby, overlook the institutional framework that shapes these structures and rights of migrant sex workers.

Drawing on the poststructuralist thinking offered by Bacchi, I recognise migrant ‘illegality’ and ‘deportability’ as social and legal conditions produced by the Danish state. Through rhetorically constructing a narrative of sex work as a ‘hole in Danish society’ and portraying migrant women selling sex as ‘vulnerable victims’, the Danish state legitimises anti-immigration and anti-trafficking interventions that limit the mobility and rights of migrant sex workers. Within this narrative, the discursive formation and legal regulation of migrant sex workers position them in a framework of vulnerability and victimisation, which simplifies and depoliticises their migratory trajectories, voices, and lack of rights. Hence, the emphasis on vulnerability, present in both the national action plans on trafficking and political debates on sex work, fosters and reproduces the so-called ‘rescue industry’. I argue that these rescue interventions are composed of a web of interacting and opposing policies of border controls, police enforcement, and immigration policies, which aim to both ‘rescue’ victims while, at the same time, target the very same migrants as ‘illegal’. Moreover, the conceptualisation of migrant sex workers as vulnerable victims portrays a narrative of migrant women being passive in their migratory journeys and as easily coerced. This victimising language neglects the voices and motives of migrant sex workers, and the global factors that shape and impact their decision to migrate and sell sex. Through incorporating the broader global factors of poverty, global

inequality, and neoliberal globalisation, I argue that a more nuanced and multifaceted perspective can add to the field and topic of migrant sex work.

Since this thesis has been focused on the conceptualisation and regulation of migrant sex workers, I cannot conclude on the subjective experiences of migrant sex workers. This kind of assessment would require research in the form of ethnographic fieldwork or qualitative interviews. However, the aim of this research has been to offer insights into how migrant sex workers are regulated through different policy interventions, making them subject to binary and conflicting categorisations. This representation of migrant sex workers, as articulated and practised by the Danish state, reproduces gendered and simplified narratives that undermines their agency and voices.

Future research should engage in the topic of migrant sex work through an intersectional perspective. As mentioned in the limitations section, it was beyond the scope of this study to examine how migrant sex workers are positioned and impacted differently by immigration policies and anti-trafficking interventions based on ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality, and citizenship. Hence, future research could engage in how these intersectional factors shape and impact the regulation, vulnerability, and interaction with authorities of migrant sex workers. In addition, future studies should focus specifically on the regulation and experiences of men, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people selling sex. Incorporating these different aspects could offer valuable insights into the experiences and obstacles faced by migrant sex workers.



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## 9. Appendix

### 9.1 Appendix I: ‘What’s the Problem Represented to Be?’ Questions.

1.	What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy?
2.	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the ‘problem’?
3.	How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4.	What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? What are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?
5.	What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6.	How/where has this representation the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

The six analytical questions of the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2)

## 9.2 Appendix II: List of Material for Empirical Analysis

No.	Title	Issued by	Year	Type	Translation
1	<p>Handlingsplan til bekæmpelse af menneskehandel 2015-2018</p> <p>[Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2015-2018]</p>	The Danish Government	2015	Action plan	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
2	<p>Handlingsplan til bekæmpelse af menneskehandel 2019-2021</p> <p>[Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2019-2021]</p>	The Danish Government	2019	Action plan	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
3	<p>Handlingsplan til bekæmpelse af menneskehandel 2022-2025</p> <p>[Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2022-2025]</p>	The Danish Government	2022	Action plan	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
4	<p>Åbent samråd om prostitution</p> <p>[Open consultation on prostitution]</p>	The Danish Parliament	2019	Parliamentary debate	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
5	<p>Referat fra arbejdsgruppe om prostitution med interessenter</p> <p>[Summary from working group on prostitution with stakeholders]</p>	Gender Equality Committee	2019	Policy proposal	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
6	<p>Forslag til folketingsbeslutning om at nedsætte en arbejdsgruppe med henblik på at sikre ordentlige forhold til prostituerede.</p> <p>[Proposal to parliamentary resolution to set up a working group to ensure proper rights to prostitutes]</p>	The Social Affairs and Senior Citizens' Committee	2021	Policy proposal	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
7	<p>Udlændningeloven</p> <p>[Aliens (Consolidation) Act]</p>	Ministry of Immigration and Integration	2019	Law	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
8	International Migration – Denmark 2023	Ministry of Immigration and Integration	2023	Report	

9	Udlændinge- og Integrationsudvalget (UUI) Alm. Del – Spørgsmål 326  [Immigration and Integration Committee – Question 326]	Ministry of Immigration and Integration	2022	Parliamentary question	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
10	Social- og Ældreudvalget (SOU) Alm. Del – Spørgsmål 30  [Social Affairs and Senior Citizen Committee (SOU) – Question 30]	Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior	2020	Parliamentary question	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
11	Et stærkere Danmark – Styr på flygtningestrømmen  [A Stronger Denmark – Control the refugee flow]	The Danish Government	2016	Action plan	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
12	Menneskehandel i Danmark 2021 – Årsrapport  [Human Trafficking in Denmark 2021 – Annual Rapport]	Social Services	2021	Annual report	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
13	Arbejdsrapport om den politimæssige kontrol i grænseområder og lufthavne mv. med henblik på bekæmpelse af illegal indvandring og tilrejsende kriminelle  [Working report on police enforcement in border areas and airports etc. in order to combat illegal migration and travelling criminals]	Ministry of Justice	2014	Policy proposal	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
14	Migration fra lande uden for EU  [Migration from countries outside of EU]	The Danish Parliament	2024	Policy brief	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
15	Regeringen afsætter 15 millioner til kampagne mod illegal migration  [The Government allocates 15 million to campaign against illegal migration]	The Danish Government		Policy proposal	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
16	Kommissorium fra arbejdsgruppe om prostitution  [Terms of reference from working group on prostitution]	Ministry of Children and Social Affairs	2019	Policy proposal	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen



17	<p>Astrid Krag: Prostitution skal ikke normaliseres, kvinder skal hjælpes ud af brutale erhverv</p> <p>[Astrid Krag: Prostitution should not be normalised; women must be helped out of brutal professions]</p>	Information	2019	Newspaper article	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen
18	<p>Kritikere: Regeringen lukker vigtig debat om prostitution</p> <p>[Critics: The Government closes important debate on prostitution]</p>	Politiken	2019	Newspaper article	Translation by Sara Veronica Eriksen