

UPR Briefing Note: The Use of Mechanical Restraints in Psychiatric Institutions

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Background:

This Note discusses the use of mechanical restraints in psychiatric institutions.

Since 2014, there has been a focus on reducing the use of all forms of coercion at psychiatric institutions in Denmark. In 2025, a new plan for the sector was adopted aiming for a reduction of coercion by 30% in 2030 and for use of mechanical restraints only in exceptional cases with a maximum duration of four hours.ⁱ This plan introduces new restrictive practices that are labelled “less intrusive forms of coercion”, e.g. locking up in the room.ⁱⁱ

In 2024, mechanical restraints were used in 3.855 cases (a total of 1.100 adults).ⁱⁱⁱ The average duration was 17 hours. This represents a decrease of app. 3,6 % when compared to 2021-23.

The use of means of restraint in psychiatric institutions in Denmark has faced criticism by the UN Human Rights Committees^{iv} and the CPT^v that recommended to increase efforts to reduce those practices.^{vi}

Court Judgements:

Despite political ambitions, cases regarding mechanical restraints continue to be adjudicated at Danish courts and the

European Court on Human Rights. Denmark was found to be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights article 3 in *Aggerholm v. Denmark* related to the use of mechanical restraints (belt fixation) during almost 23 hours.^{vii} Other cases are pending at the courts, including a case related to the same person Aggerholm related to 18 days restraints.^{viii}

Recommendations:

Amend the Psychiatric Act to ensure means of restraint are used only exceptionally, as a means of last resort, and if used, to reduce its duration for as short a time as possible.

Prevent the use of coercive measures, especially forms likely to amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.

Ensure adequate resources and provide training to staff on how to prevent the use of coercion.

Ensure that patients are never mechanically restrained due to the lack of capacity and resources.

ⁱ Ministry of Interior and Health. Agreement on a comprehensive 10-year plan for mental health: 2020–2030, p. 35. [Aftale om en samlet 10-årsplan for psykiatrien-2025.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱ *Ib.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Sundhedsstyrelsen, Task Force for Forebyggelse af Tvang i Psykiatrien - Task Force for Forebyggelse af Tvang i Psykiatrien, Årsrapport 2024, p.8.

^{iv} Eg. UN Committee on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Denmark, 2024.

^v CPT, Report to the Danish Government, 2024, [1680b2bb49](#)

^{vi} *Ib.*, pp. 60-62.

^{vii} *Aggerholm v. Denmark*, 45439/18, ECHR, 15 September 2020.

^{viii} *Abdeelhadi Abbas Makki*, 0297/23, ECHR, 22 October 2022. Case at the Eastern High Court (Østre Landsret) no. BS-57359/2024-OLR.