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National Operations Department  
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Criminal Justice Committee  
The Scottish Parliament

## Prostitution statistics

What impact have the changes in the laws governing the sale and purchase of sexual services in your country had on:

**a) Levels of prostitution or the sale of sexual services as they have been observed or recorded by police, statutory and other service providers**

It's been observed that the levels of prostitution continuously have decreased since the criminalization. In 2008, about 10 years after the implementation of the law, a public inquiry estimated that the street prostitution had decreased with 50%. Before the criminalization equal levels of prostitution was observed in the three Scandinavian countries, and after the implementation of the sex purchase act in Sweden, there was a significant increase in Norway and Denmark.<sup>1</sup> The same inquiry estimates that about 10% of the Swedish men have bought sex, which is a low number in comparison to other countries, and the Swedish sex-buyers more often buys sex abroad, although some answered that law had the preventive effect to either reduce or stop their behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

And we still see a significant effect on the demand in comparison to the other Nordic countries as a result of the practice in combination with the appraised normative effect of the law.<sup>3</sup> As an example; on the website of Real escort, a common site for advertising prostitution in the Nordic countries, last Friday on the 14<sup>th</sup>, there were exactly 80 individual advertisements of women in prostitution in Sweden and 391 in Finland. And yet the population in Finland is about half the size of in Sweden. Furthermore, field work officers have noticed that the women previously exploited in Sweden are moved to neighbouring countries like Norway. This is to a certain extent related to the business itself but also most likely an effect of the outreach field work conducted in Sweden, since we notice that the women move to Norway during action weeks in Sweden.

<sup>1</sup> SOU 2010:49 (Swedish Government Official Reports)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, s. 124

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, s. 37

The statistics on the reports of sex purchase in a Nordic comparison: Norway: 507 cases of sex purchase cases, incl. minors (2020-2025) Sweden: 7338 sex purchase cases, incl. minors (2019-2023).<sup>4</sup>

**b) The use of violence towards those active in the sex industry, particularly women and girls, either observed or recorded by police, statutory and other service providers**

Due to the sex purchase act the field-work officers can access the women, even without a suspicion of trafficking or procuring, and inform themselves about violent situations the exploited women and girls are exposed to. About a third of the women in prostitution report additional crimes such as physical violence, rapes and robberies and almost 50 % of the minors in western Sweden in the annual report of 2022.<sup>5</sup> In 2023 and 2024 serial rapists targeting women in prostitution were arrested and sentenced to 8 years of prison each. Their activities were disclosed in the outreach field work as the women told the Police about similar situations. The multiagency team - consisting of police and social services – is the success factor in this regard with a victim-oriented approach in order to build trust and help the women.

**c) The number of offences and successful prosecutions of those purchasing sexual services**

The number of prosecutions of trafficking, procuring, purchase of sexual acts and related crimes, all depend on the efforts made in the outreach field-work. 85% of the trafficking cases for all purposes and related crimes have been initiated in the outreach field-work and 95% regarding sexual exploitation. Between 1999 and 2023, 14 951 sex purchase acts were registered.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it's crucial to apply field-work both digitally and physically to prevent and combat exploitation. But the law has a crime preventive effect on organized crime in itself.

A recent report from the Swedish Police estimates that criminal networks most often are connected to venues where sexual exploitation was disclosed. In addition to the exploitation, crimes such as drug and weapon trade, black mail, child pornography and various financial crimes such as tax fraud have been revealed.<sup>7</sup> A report about the open prostitution in the Netherlands reveals that 78% of the brothel owners have criminal background.<sup>8</sup> However, Europol states in the report *Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks*<sup>9</sup> that criminal networks solemnly dedicating themselves to human trafficking don't operate in the Nordic countries to the same extent as in other European countries.

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<sup>4</sup> Brå, Nordic Police Network

<sup>5</sup> Annual situation report Human trafficking 2022:

<https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/manniskohandel/manniskohandel-for-sexuella-och-andra-andamal---lagesrapport-24.pdf/download/?v=b3d515e8b3ef89196715f1076aeae02a>

<sup>6</sup> Brå (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention)

<sup>7</sup> [https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/ovriga\\_rapporter/slutrapport-projekt-manniskohandel-230503.pdf/download/?v=34af47be06a8ebdbb8628e6548574b5a](https://polisen.se/siteassets/dokument/ovriga_rapporter/slutrapport-projekt-manniskohandel-230503.pdf/download/?v=34af47be06a8ebdbb8628e6548574b5a)

<sup>8</sup> Failed promises: the history of legal prostitution and sex trafficking in the kingdom of the Netherlands, 2025

<sup>9</sup> Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks, 2024

**Have there been challenges for the police, prosecution bodies or the courts in implementing and administration the new laws? If so, can you provide further detail.**

Not significantly, to my knowledge. On the contrary, the practise of the law has been facilitated by the fact that the victim of the crime does not carry the formal status of a victim in the criminal proceedings, meaning her testimony is not needed in the prosecution, which makes the administration of the law more efficient. In the severe procuring cases under human trafficking-like circumstances, the victims can be identified as a formal victim of the crime, which gives similar status as a victim of human trafficking.

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