
**THE PROSTITUTION
SYSTEM:
A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF
LEGISLATIVE
FRAMEWORKS IN FRANCE,
THE NETHERLANDS,
GERMANY AND SWEDEN**

Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International)

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With **the law of 13 April 2016**,¹ France confirms its abolitionist stance on prostitution. This law is based on four main pillars:

- Decriminalisation of persons involved in prostitution.
- Prohibition on purchasing sexual acts
- The fight against pimping and human trafficking.
- Creating pathways out of prostitution

EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EXIT PATHWAYS

2,102 people have benefited from a PSP since 2017.
90% are currently employed.
100% of them have accommodation.



**Figures relating only to persons supported by FACT-S associations²*

10,049³ men fined for soliciting prostitution from an adult.

1,243⁴ men fined for soliciting prostitution from a minor



AN AMBITIOUS FRAMEWORK FOR COMBATING PIMPING⁵

65 organised crime networks were dismantled in 2024.

1,029 persons convicted of procuring.

14.7 millions of euros seized from prostitution rings

A POPULATION THAT SUPPORTS THE ABOLITIONIST MODEL⁶

76% consider prostitution to be a form of violence.

68% consider prostitution to be an obstacle to gender equality.

92% consider that the 2016 law 'is a good thing'.

► RAISING AWARENESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Prostitution and pornography are addressed as part of the national programme on Education in Emotional, Relational and Sexual Matters (EVARS). It includes information on the prostitution of minors.⁷



NETHERLANDS

Population : 18 millions

On 1 October 2000, **Law No. 464⁸** came into force in the Netherlands, lifting the general ban on prostitution establishments. This reform lifted the ban on brothels, decriminalised pimping and officially legalised prostitution. Municipalities now require brothel operators to obtain a licence.

VERY POOR SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PROSTITUTION.



Today, only two centres offer health and legal support.⁹

THE INCREASE IN 'UNREGULATED' PROSTITUTION

It is very difficult to estimate the number of people involved in prostitution. In 2024, figures varied from :

24,000 to 31,000¹⁰

In 2002¹¹ and 2007,¹² two official government evaluations of the 2000 law showed an increase in 'unregulated' prostitution. With the proliferation of prostitution venues, control has become difficult, creating grey areas in which illegal exploitation thrives.

UNCONTROLLED DEMAND

- Combating demand is a major blind spot.
- In some municipalities, it is legal to pay for sexual acts from the age of 16.
- Tourism is a major driver of demand: 50% of clients in Amsterdam's window shops are tourists.

In 2017, **1/5 men¹³** purchased a sexual act at least once in their lifetime.

A DISASTER IN TERMS OF EQUALITY: RIDE FOR A RIDE¹⁴

In December 2015, the Dutch government approved the possibility for driving instructors to accept sex as payment for lessons. This endorses the idea that sexuality can become a currency of exchange and enshrines the extreme commodification of human relationships.



GERMANY

Population: 83.5 millions

In 2002, **the Prostitution Act**¹⁵ officially legalised prostitution in Germany. Pimping is permitted. In 2017, the legislative framework was supplemented by the Prostitution Protection Act (ProstSchG), which introduced the obligation **to register** with a competent authority.

In 2024, Germany recorded 32,254 people engaged in prostitution registered in the official register, of whom 17% were German nationals and 83% were non-German nationals. The most represented nationality was Romanian, with 11,512 registered (36%).¹⁶ These data only concern officially declared prostitution. Estimates vary between **200,000 and 400,000**¹⁷ persons in prostitution, which is 10 times more than in France.

AN INDUSTRIAL-SCALE PROSTITUTION SYSTEM

- Over 2,200 licensed brothels and many more unlicensed establishments.¹⁸
- ‘Mega brothels’ employ up to a hundred prostitutes and welcome thousands of clients every year. They are characterised by their enormous size, varied infrastructure and international clientele.
- Every day, over **1 million men** purchase sex in Germany
- Some brothels offer packages that include unlimited drinks, sauna, bathrobe and women.¹⁹

INCREASED DEMAND, EXPANDING TRADE

In 2023, of the 428 victims of sexual exploitation identified, only 51 were engaged in declared work, a low figure that can be explained by the difficulty of identifying victims behind legal facades.²⁰

In 2018, the owner of the Paradise brothel in Stuttgart was sentenced to five years in prison for **complicity in human trafficking**.

▶ There is no national framework for supporting people leaving prostitution, which relies mainly on **the work of NGOs**. Since 2000, 118 murders of people involved in prostitution have been recorded.²¹



The Sex Purchase Act of 1 January 1999²² criminalises the purchase of sexual acts without criminalising the sale. The law therefore aims to tackle demand by penalising clients who use prostitutes, without penalising prostitutes themselves.

A 'DEAD MARKET FOR PROSTITUTION'

The criminalisation of paying for sex has had an impact on individual behaviour; demand **has fallen significantly**. In 1996, 13.6% of men admitted to having paid for sex, compared with 8% in 2008.

According to the National Criminal Police, the ban on purchasing sexual services is an obstacle²³ to human traffickers and pimps establishing themselves in Sweden.

CRIMINALISATION OF PURCHASERS OF SEXUAL ACTS ONLINE

In July 2025, Sweden extended the Sex Purchase Act to the digital sphere: the purchase of sexual acts performed remotely, via the Internet, is criminalised. This is a world first.²⁴

THE NORMATIVE EFFECT OF THE LAW



One of the most frequently highlighted aspects of the Swedish model is its normative effect, i.e. its ability to bring about lasting change in social attitudes and behaviour, beyond mere criminal sanctions.

70%²⁷ of Swedes believe that purchasing sexual services should be illegal.

0 murders of people involved in prostitution since 1999.²⁵

PATHWAYS OUT OF PROSTITUTION

The Swedish police work closely with social workers to inform people involved in prostitution about their rights and the legislation in force, and to offer them support in leaving prostitution.²⁶

Legislative changes are underway to more formally integrate pathways out of prostitution (PSP) into a forthcoming reform.

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