

Written evidence submitted by Nordic Model Now! to the Crime & Policing Bill Committee (CPB31)

About us

[Nordic Model Now!](#) is a secular, feminist, grassroots women's group based in the UK campaigning for the abolition of prostitution and related practices (such as lap-dancing, pornography and surrogacy) and for the Nordic Model approach to prostitution policy and legislation. We receive no institutional or public funding, all our members are unpaid activists, and about half our active members have lived experience of prostitution.

Summary

This evidence relates to amendments NC2, NC3 and NC4, which seek to introduce new legislation relating to prostitution that would bring us closer to the Nordic Model. However, we have concerns about aspects of the amendments, including that by not making provisions for services for women involved in prostitution, including genuine routes out of the industry, they fall short of the Nordic Model. We have therefore started with an introduction to the Nordic Model to help committee members understand its aims and how it has worked in practice.

About the Nordic Model

[The Nordic Model](#) is an approach to prostitution that was introduced in Sweden in 1999 after extensive research revealed (a) the extent of women's suffering in prostitution and (b) sex buyers' ignorance and lack of care of the consequences of their actions. Since then it has been introduced in several other countries, including Norway, France, Ireland and Israel.

The Nordic Model recognises prostitution as a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and as both a cause and a consequence of the enduring inequality between the sexes. It seeks to reduce the individual and societal harms caused by prostitution by reducing demand and the proportion of the population involved in prostitution.

It has five elements:

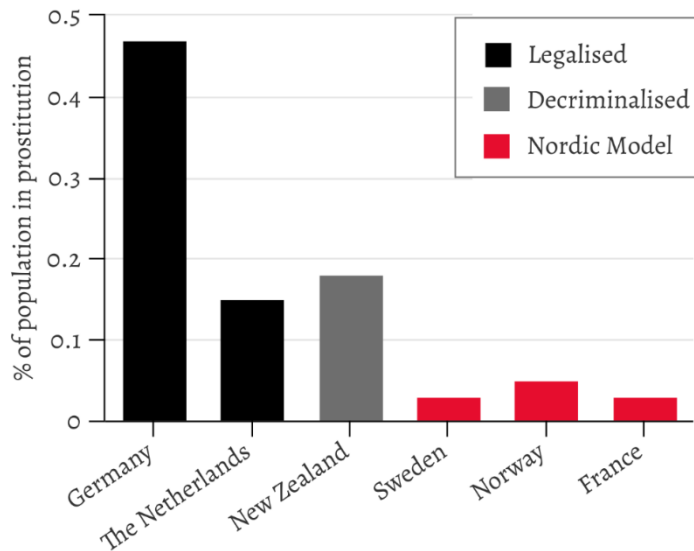
- It decriminalises selling sex.
- It provides support for those who sell sex, including genuine routes out of the industry.
- Buying or attempting to buy sex become a criminal offence.
- It strengthens laws against trafficking, pimping and brothel-keeping.
- It provides holistic measures including public education programmes, particularly for young people, and training for the police.

Not all the countries that have introduced this approach have implemented all of the elements of the model or provided the funding required for its success.

There is little reliable data about the sex industry in any country, regardless of the regime in force. Even under Germany's regulated system, the sex industry is the only German industry for which there are no reliable statistics about the numbers involved. This lack of robust data suggests a lack of

political will to fully investigate the reality. Any data on the sex trade must therefore be considered approximations.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we used publicly available data¹ to create the following chart that presents the numbers involved in prostitution in six countries as a percentage of the population.



This shows that a much smaller proportion of the population is involved in prostitution under the Nordic Model in Sweden, Norway, and France, than under legalisation and full decriminalisation in Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand. This suggests that the Nordic Model is effective in containing the sex industry – if not in reducing its size, at least in preventing its growth.

The prostitution industry is hugely lucrative. In [2013 its global annual turnover](#) was estimated as €100 billion, with €20 billion of this in Europe alone. It is undoubtedly much bigger now. The ONS estimates that it [contributed £6.3 billion to GDP](#) in 2023 and that, with the exception of the Covid lockdowns, this has been growing steadily over the previous decades. Most of this money does not end up in the pockets of the women and other marginalised individuals directly involved. By the [ONS's own estimation](#), the income after costs to these people is about 24.2% of gross – meaning that 75.8% of the gross income goes to pimps, brothel owners, commercial sex websites, and other third parties.

This means that there are many vested interests in the success and expansion of the prostitution industry, not only the pimps and traffickers, but also Vivastreet, Adultwork and other prostitution advertising websites, and the banking and IT industries, taxi drivers, security guards, receptionists, and similar who underpin its smooth running, along with NGOs that undertake HIV and harm prevention work, the “Belle de Jour” types who carve out a niche for themselves glamorising the reality, and the academics and researchers who produce the studies that insist that prostitution is a normal job etc. Then there is the Treasury, which enjoys the tax revenues and increased GDP, and the way that prostitution’s role as last ditch option for destitute women absolves them of providing proper social security. To all this we must add men. We know that not all men are punters. But all men know that prostitution is available to them any time they need their ego building up, or someone to offload their frustration on. At some level they know that prostitution shores up the inequality between men

and women, from which they derive benefit – just like the prevalence of rape and sexual harassment does.

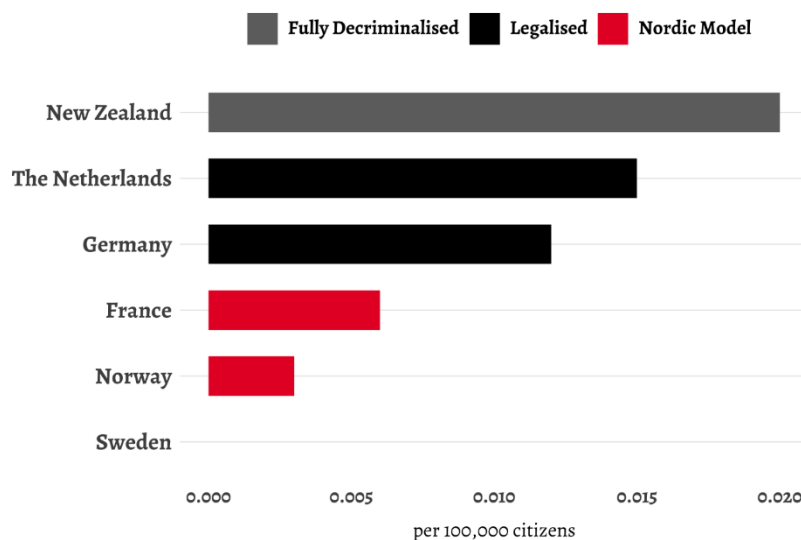
We should not be surprised therefore that there is huge opposition to the Nordic Model and that lobbyists for the expansion of the industry make many claims about it that are simply false.

What these lobbyists seldom discuss however, is the enormous cost of prostitution to wider society. For example, how not only is it a [form of VAWG in and of itself](#), but it also tends to lead men to be [more violent](#) to women and girls in the general population; how men's prostitution use contributes to family breakdown; how its presence and normalisation grooms girls as fodder for the industry and boys into the kind of behaviour seen in the Netflix series, Adolescence, and as sex buyers and even pimps and pornographers; how third parties trafficking and profiting from women's prostitution is a major source of income for organised crime and terrorist groups; and its negative impact on children's welfare. All of these factors and more cost the country dear. It simply makes sound [economic sense to invest in the Nordic Model](#).

The claim that the Nordic Model is more dangerous is untrue

In July 2024 the [European Court of Human Rights](#) unanimously held that France's introduction of the Nordic Model approach in 2016 did not violate Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights – the right to a private and family life. The applicants claimed that the Nordic Model has increased the harms and made prostitution more violent and dangerous for those involved. The judgement refuted this, **concluding that these harms and dangers existed before the 2016 law was enacted and suggesting that violence is inherent to prostitution**. The applicants were refused leave to appeal, so this judgement is final.

Women involved in prostitution suffer [staggering amounts of violence](#). They have a [mortality rate 12 times higher](#) than women in the general population, and are the occupational group with the [highest rate of homicide](#), mostly by pimps and punters. The following chart shows the number of women involved in prostitution who were murdered by pimps and punters in the six countries we discussed above. The [data is expressed](#) as an average annual rate per 100,000 female citizens during the years in which the legislative framework has been in place.



Data source: <http://www.sexindustry-kills.de>; Female citizens

This clearly shows that the homicide of women involved in prostitution is significantly higher in New Zealand, Germany and the Netherlands where prostitution is legal than in Sweden, Norway or France, which have implemented the Nordic Model. This suggests that the claim that the Nordic Model is more dangerous for women involved in prostitution is false.

We do not claim that the Nordic Model is safer for women because we do not believe that anything can make prostitution safe. Instead, it aims to reduce the amount of prostitution that takes place, and the numbers of people involved. This data suggests that when all five elements are implemented well, the Nordic Model is successful in this.

Amendments NC2, NC3 and NC4 to the Crime & Policing Bill

We have a number of concerns about these amendments, which we detail below.

NC2: “Commercial sexual exploitation”

While we are 100% in favour of criminalising the purchase or attempted purchase of sex acts as part of the Nordic Model, we do not believe that this amendment as drafted is fit for purpose.

No provision for services offering exit strategies and viable alternatives

We are concerned that amendment NC2, which criminalises paying for sexual acts, does not include provision for the allocation of funding to support women who wish to exit prostitution.

We strongly recommend therefore that an additional amendment is introduced that would (a) create a statutory obligation to provide ring-fenced funding for high-quality services for those selling sex including genuine routes out of the industry and viable alternatives; and (b) make access to such services a legal right for all those selling sex acts.

Without such provision, the amendments do not amount to the Nordic Model.

Women [often struggle to leave prostitution](#). Studies have shown that 90% of women involved in prostitution would exit if they were able to do so.² The [challenges they face](#) are similar to those faced by women seeking to leave abusive relationships.

Austerity budgets imposed since 2010, the impact of more recent increases in the cost of living and ongoing public spending cuts have contributed to a large increase in the number of women becoming involved in prostitution. Reports from the [Women’s Budget Group](#) show that every budget since 2010 has benefitted men at the expense of women.

Failing to provide for the allocation of ring-fenced funding for support services, including support for women who wish to exit, is likely to lead to devastating hardship for those selling sex and will substantially limit the effectiveness of the legislation.

While we appreciate that providing such services would cost a significant amount, we are confident that if combined with simple and effective legislation against the purchase or attempted purchase of sex acts, there would be considerable savings to the public purse in the medium to long term because of lower social and criminal justice costs. For more on this, please see our report, [The Social & Economic Costs of Prostitution & Other Forms of Sexual Exploitation: The Case for Investing in Equality](#).

The proposed legislation is overly complex

One of the key aims of criminalising the purchase or attempted purchase of sex acts is to change men's behaviour and social norms. [Research with sex buyers](#) shows that a risk of being caught or exposed would change their behaviour. If we want the legislation to be effective in these aims, society must show that it is serious. Men need to know about the law and see the police taking it seriously and arresting and charging enough punters that getting caught is a statistical possibility. For this to happen, the legislation needs to be clear and easy to enforce. We do not believe that this amendment meets these criteria and we believe there is a risk it would become white elephant legislation.

We already have legislation in England and Wales that makes it a [criminal offence](#) to buy sex from someone who has been forced or coerced. It is a strict liability offence and the maximum sentence is a level 3 fine. Although there were a significant number of prosecutions in its first year of operation, it has now fallen out of use and there were [no prosecutions at all](#) for this offence in the five years to 2022. We believe that this is largely because there is a fundamental contradiction in the way the offence is framed.

The prosecution has to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the woman had been forced, coerced or deceived by a named person. In the murky world of prostitution this is not easy and it invariably requires considerable police work to bring a successful prosecution, but the police do not invest many resources into investigating offences that carry such a low penalty. As a result it is barely used.

Clause 3(c) appears to mean that there must be proof beyond reasonable doubt that an in-person sex act has taken place. This will make enforcement difficult and complex and we expect that as a result it would also be barely used. **We therefore advocate that clause 3(c) is dropped.**

We recommend learning from the Swedish and French laws, which we find elegant in their simplicity and ease of understanding.

Here is the [Swedish law](#):

“Section 11 A person who, otherwise than as previously provided in this Chapter, obtains a casual sexual relation in return for payment, shall be sentenced for purchase of sexual service to a fine or imprisonment for at most one year. The provision of the first paragraph also apply if the payment was promised or given by another person.”

And here is [the French law](#):

“Art. 611-1.-The act of soliciting, accepting or obtaining sexual relations from a person who engages in prostitution, including occasionally, in exchange for remuneration, a promise of remuneration, the provision of a benefit in kind or the promise of such a benefit is punishable by the fine provided for fifth class offenses.”

Note that neither require proof that a sex act has taken place – merely “promising” payment is sufficient. This means that making an appointment via a prostitution advertising website is enough to commit the offence. This makes it simple and straightforward to enforce while giving the prostituted person dignity. This is what we need in England and Wales.

The title is obscure

We recommend that the title of this new legislation is changed from “Commercial sexual exploitation” which is obfuscating to “Purchase or attempted purchase of sex acts” or similar, which would immediately make the offence clear.

NC3: “Victims of commercial sexual exploitation”

No provision to expunge criminal records for loitering or soliciting

NC3 repeals the offence of “Loitering or soliciting for purposes of prostitution” and relevant related parts of the Street Offences Act 1959. We strongly support this. We are dismayed, however, that the amendment doesn’t also provide for the expunging of criminal records for this offence and [prostitutes’ cautions](#).

Such [criminal records](#) cause significant difficulties to women attempting to exit prostitution and afterwards as they work to rebuild their lives. Criminal records for these offences often rule out many jobs, particularly those in the care, health, and education sectors, which these women might otherwise be eligible for.

While some of these criminal records are now [filtered out](#), this applies only after 11 years (6 years for a prostitute’s caution) and there are exceptions, including that the offences and prostitutes’ cautions are retained on the Police National Computer (PNC) until the woman reaches 100 years of age.

We strongly recommend that NC3 is amended to expunge all criminal records and prostitutes’ cautions for “Loitering or soliciting for purposes of prostitution” and to remove the same from the PNC.

NC4: “Modern Slavery Act”

We have been [calling for some time](#) for the definition of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to be brought into line with the international definition set out in the [Palermo Protocol](#) which the UK has ratified and is therefore bound to implement under international law.

We broadly support the proposed amendments to section 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 in NC4 but are concerned that it does not also amend the definition of sexual exploitation in Section 3 of the 2015 Act.

Currently, Section 3 does not fully define sexual exploitation, unlike the other forms of exploitation it refers to, except for the removal of organs. Instead, it relies on a long list of offences in the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

While the list includes controlling someone’s prostitution for gain and various offences related to the sexual exploitation of a child, there are many other possible offences in the list. This obscures the fact that trafficking for the purpose of exploiting (i.e. [profiting from](#)) a woman or girl’s prostitution is the most common form of human trafficking, and that to prevent it, we are required under international law to reduce men’s demand for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation.

In addition, most of the listed offences in the other two acts hinge on the consent of the victim, which contravenes the international definition of human trafficking, and some of the offences have other restrictions that are much narrower than the international definition of sex trafficking. For example,

most of the child sexual offences apply only if the child is under 13 or the defendant “reasonably believed” the child to be over 15 (17 in cases of child sexual exploitation).

This increases the difficulty of securing convictions, because, for example, the prosecution must prove that the defendant didn’t “reasonably believe” the victim was older than 15 (or 17 in “sexual exploitation” cases) and/or the prosecution must prove that the defendant didn’t reasonably believe the victim had consented to the act in question. This is a further departure from the international definition.

As most sex trafficking victims are female, we see this as sex discrimination, in violation of Article 3 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which requires human trafficking provisions to be implemented without discrimination on the grounds of sex, and of Article 17, which requires a gender mainstreaming approach.

We recommend that Section 3 of the 2015 Act should be amended to fully define sexual exploitation in line with the international definition. For example:

“Sexual exploitation

(3) The exploitation of or profiting from V’s prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, including pornography, lap dancing, stripping, or live streaming sexual acts.”

This would bring the definition of sexual exploitation more into line with both the international definition and the definitions of the other common forms of exploitation. It would facilitate prosecution and clarify the links between human trafficking and prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation and would therefore facilitate prevention.

March 2025

¹. Population data taken from <https://www.worldometers.info>. Numbers in prostitution as below.

Country	# People in prostitution	Total population	% pop in prostitution	Sex trade
Germany	400,000 (a)	84,242,771	0.47%	Legalised
The Netherlands	25,000 (b)	17,199,668	0.15%	Legalised
New Zealand	8,000 (c)	4,888,873	0.18%	Decriminalised
Sweden	2,500 (d)	10,207,834	0.03%	Nordic Model
Norway	3,000 (e)	5,494,575	0.05%	Nordic Model
France	20,000 (f)	65,520,393	0.03%	Nordic Model

(a) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_statistics_by_country

(b) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_statistics_by_country

(c) [http://1425f57e-5a05-4bdc-8183-](http://1425f57e-5a05-4bdc-8183-747efed61d9f.filesusr.com/ugd/7f14e6_e427c650927141b9b9a2cfed936e1ca1.pdf)

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(d) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_statistics_by_country

(e) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_Norway

(f) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_statistics_by_country

² See <https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-trafficking-in-nine-countries-an-update-on-violence-and-post-traumatic-stress-disorder/>

The 2008 report of the committee set up by the New Zealand government to regularly review the operation of its 2003 law fully decriminalising prostitution said that 90% of its survey respondents cited money as the reason why they remained in the sex industry, with lack of money also given as the reason why most of those they interviewed who exited and then returned had done so.

<https://prostitutescollective.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/report-of-the-nz-prostitution-law-committee-2008.pdf>