

# Sex Trafficking in Europe:

## Qualitative observations on sex trafficking situations in Prague, Amsterdam, and Stockholm

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the complexity of sex trafficking in Europe, by observing and comparing the state of sex trafficking in three locations. This paper is an exploratory essay that presents the policies and practices of private and public organizations in Prague, Amsterdam, and Stockholm. It also highlights some of the counter-trafficking efforts in these locations. Through our research, we found that increasing the general public's awareness of sex trafficking is of primary importance with regards to prevention. It is also crucial to maintain flexibility when implementing counter-trafficking strategies. The most effective efforts are unique to each situation.

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## Introduction

Sex trafficking looks drastically different in Southeast Asia than it does in Africa or South America or the United States. However, even within the continent of Europe, uniformity is hard to find. Sex trafficking in Europe is malleable. It is volatile. It is hidden and deceptive. It does not respect borders and nationalities, but examining the issue from within multiple locations does have value when trying to categorize, typify, and define sex trafficking on the European continent. To better understand the issue of sex trafficking, previous definitions of, and research on, trafficking in persons were examined, as well as the current situation in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

The current operating definition for many intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations fighting trafficking comes from The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. They [define trafficking in persons](#) as:

*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.* (“Protocol to prevent,” 2012)

Firsthand evidence from the three countries that were researched shows that the issue is much larger than the confines of this definition. Defining trafficking becomes complicated in practice because the process of trafficking varies based on location, socioeconomic status, and other factors. Trafficking women from Romania for sex slavery is a very different practice from keeping men in bondage in South India. For this reason, a study of this size and length is

incapable of adequately describing trafficking as a whole and defining sex trafficking is not the goal of this paper.

Sex trafficking was chosen because of its pertinence to Europe in comparison to forced labor and organ trafficking. Another reason for a focus on sex trafficking is that information from both the governmental and non-governmental sectors within Europe is readily available. However, even with this information being readily available, there was great difficulty in compiling a sufficient set of experiences and research to complete this project. Sex trafficking in Europe is often hidden too well to examine.

Part of the difficulty of describing sex trafficking in Europe is the foggy distinction between prostitution and sex trafficking. While many regard prostitution as the oldest profession - and one that will not be gone any time soon - the problem lies in the fact that many prostitutes do not choose the work by their own accord. Some may elect to sell their bodies, but others are coerced into the trade with little opportunity to escape. This paper explores how governmental and non-governmental entities deal with the prevalence of human trafficking in, and outside of, prostitution.

Because of this difficulty, firsthand experience became one of the only options to research the issue. The time spent in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Sweden was used to detail current policies and practices for and against sex trafficking in Europe. The policies and practices that were found show a variety of approaches to combating sex trafficking, as well as how the sex trade, and in particular sex slavery, changes based on location.

## Prague, Czech Republic

### IOM Introduction

The [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) is the leading intergovernmental organization for migration. The IOM's mission statement says that the IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits both migrants and society. Established in 1951, the IOM was created after World War II to help resettle and reintegrate people displaced during the war ("IOM in brief," 2012). Since, the IOM has developed partnerships with governmental, non-governmental, and other intergovernmental agencies to focus efforts in four specific areas concerning migration: migration and development, facilitating migration, regulating migration and addressing forced migration. For the purposes of this project, the focus is on the division of the IOM that deals with forced migration.

The IOM has adopted an approach based on three principles to countering forced migration, or human trafficking: the "respect for human rights; physical, mental and social well-being of the individual and his or her community; and sustainability through institutional capacity building of governments and civil society" ("Counter trafficking," 2012). Through these basic principles the IOM has a vision "to fight against exploitation of migrants in all its forms, especially the severe human rights violations suffered by trafficked persons" ("Counter trafficking," 2012).

### IOM Definition

In order to help combat the ambiguity that comes with defining human trafficking, the IOM has adopted the comparison made by the United Nations between human trafficking and smuggling. According to the [UN Trafficking Protocol](#), smuggling is a crime against the state in

which a migrant pays to be illegally transported into the country. However, human trafficking is a crime against an individual that involves exploitation through some type of force, deception, or abuse (“UNODC on human,” 2012).

Although this comparison helps the IOM better identify victims of trafficking, there is an extensive list of challenges to overcome. One of the IOM’s largest struggles is victim identification. As victims of abuse and exploitation, many trafficked victims do not want to see themselves as victims. Men, in particular, who are trafficked for labor or sexual exploitation have an issue with identifying themselves as subjects of human trafficking.

An additional complication to identifying trafficked victims is the lack of reliable, comparable, timely data. It is nearly impossible to be able to collect accurate data on the number of trafficked victims. The IOM uses a system called the Counter-Trafficking Module (CTM) that uses primary data from the victims to compile personal information. The CTM is not uniform across the organizations and data is sometimes skewed. Trafficked victims are often counted twice within the system due to reports from both the country of origin and the country of destination. On the other hand, there are some countries like Austria who do not directly report victims into the database. (B. Salcher, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

### **IOM Assistance**

Despite the many challenges, the IOM has been successful with helping victims of trafficking through its reintegration program, known as [Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#) (AVRR). The reintegration program provides assistance to victims who voluntarily want to return to their country of origin. One of the benefits of the program is that victims of trafficking are only reintegrated into countries that have an IOM. With this

advantage, the IOM can continually track and take care of the victims, as well as provide them with in-kind contributions, such as paying their rent and buying supplies for their personal business. From pre-departure to post-arrival the IOM is involved in helping the victim in any way possible, including safe housing, psychological support, medical care, documents, and transport ("Assisted voluntary," 2012).

Even with a unified system to human trafficking, the IOM must approach each case and country in a different manner. Differences in culture and social acceptability within the different nations provide further complications for dealing with trafficking.

### **Efforts in Prague**

In Prague, the IOM focuses specifically on trafficking education through the judicial and law enforcement system. Many of the flaws with victim identification in this area exist because of the lack of knowing when a person or persons are being trafficked. To combat this, the Czech Republic offers specialized courses to police task forces within the larger cities. The courses help police officers to better identify and recognize when a person is being trafficked (B. Salcher, personal communication, March 21, 2012). One of the initiatives by the IOM in Prague involved pocketsize guides with a list of questions in eleven languages that police officers could slip to potential victims. The guide contained a list of questions, such as "Are you being forced to work as a prostitute?" and "Have they taken away your documents (passport)?" to help identify a person being trafficked ("Pomoc," 2012).

In large part, the Czech Republic is a destination country, meaning that victims are trafficked to the Czech Republic, not just through it. Land transportation is the most prominent means of illegal migration in the Czech Republic. Therefore, trafficking education is stressed

first with border guards at country borders and then police at airports. (B. Salcher, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

Education is also needed within the judicial system in Prague. In many of the trafficking cases, victims are put through mental, emotional, and physical rehabilitation before their trial. This process that lasts about 30 days allows the victim to physically recuperate and have time to organize thoughts in order to be accurately represented. This rehabilitation process usually gives positive results for the victims, but when they appear for trial the victims seem to be fully recovered. Judges oftentimes perceive this as a sign that the victim has not suffered as much, and may not judge as justly. (B. Salcher, personal communication, March 21, 2012)

In order to prevent these cases, the IOM developed a tool for awareness that would reach about 3 million people a day. Prague has an extensive public transportation system including trams, trains, and buses that reach all corners of the city and some parts of the surrounding areas. The convenience of this system extends to a single ticket that a customer can purchase to use on all modes of public transportation. To inform the public that trafficking is still present, the IOM requested that the city place a small advertisement on the back of each ticket so that anyone purchasing a ticket can learn more about human trafficking in Prague (B. Salcher, personal communication, March 21, 2012). Methods for awareness such as this spread knowledge of the issue and thus work towards the prevention of sex trafficking by allowing those with this new knowledge to become active in fighting the issue.



## Amsterdam, the Netherlands

### Social History

Amsterdam has arguably the most famous and most historic Red Light District in the world, De Wallen. The Red Light District in Amsterdam is not one that is only visited by “johns,” customers of prostitution. It has become a place known for its history as well as its tourism. The District flourished as a result of Amsterdam's location as a port city. Sailors frequented the "pleasure houses", as the brothels were once called. There was a time in the modern era where prostitution was decriminalized. Prior to the legalization of prostitution, drugs and child prostitution were major issues, but they were also more easily identified than trafficking is under the current system. Today, tours through the District detail the process of buying sex, and inform visitors where the different "styles" of sex and women can be found. The oldest church in Amsterdam, Oude Kerk, is located in De Wallen and surrounded by prostitution windows. Such juxtaposition is one example of how ingrained prostitution is into the culture of Amsterdam. A monument sits by the church in honor to prostitution, a sure sign of how much of a non-problem prostitution is for so many Dutch people. ("History of red-light," 2012)

While prostitution seems innate to Dutch culture, very few of the prostitutes presently employed in Amsterdam are Dutch. There is a method of marking windows that allows customers to know which women are Dutch, but these are uncommon. Instead, many of the women are from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. The large majority of women come from Eastern Europe. Many of the women in the District are trafficked. Trafficking is well hidden in Amsterdam as a result of the legalization of prostitution. It is much more difficult to understand how a woman is kept against her will in the sex trade when the sex trade is legal and regulated. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

## **Involuntary Prostitution**

According to anti-trafficking workers in Amsterdam, a majority of the women in prostitution in the area are there involuntarily. The reasons keeping the women there, in spite of their desire to leave, vary by geography. Many of the women coming from Latin America are required to stay in prostitution because of familial desires. Parts of the family that remain in Latin America demand the income that is provided by the prostitution of these women. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

The African women in the Red Light District rarely end up in Amsterdam as a first destination. The Nigerian mafia plays a large role in trafficking these women, using the resources of organized crime rings to ship these women to Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe. Usually by the time these women reach a central location like Amsterdam, they have been trafficked through three, four, or five countries. Their willingness to stay in Amsterdam is at this point a result of conditioning from previous experiences being trafficked. By this time, they know no other reality. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

Women from Eastern Europe are frequently offered job opportunities abroad and then, upon arriving in the new country, in this case the Netherlands, are told that the job opportunity is prostitution. Often the way the women are kept in country is confiscation of passports, but sometimes the control is psychological. This psychological control comes from the women's pimps and "loverboys." (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

## **Pimping and Loverboys**

Pimping is a well-documented practice that involves a man who has multiple women selling themselves for sex and who are subordinate to him in how both their time and money flow. The use of loverboys is less documented and involves men, often similar in age to the prostitutes, acting as boyfriends in order to communicate orders to the women, monitor their actions while on the job, and provide basic necessities that might otherwise require the women to leave their windows during their shifts. An item integral to both pimps and loverboys in Amsterdam's sex trade is the mobile phone. They use the phones to ask how clients were and if any issues cropped up in a session; in many cases they even listen in as sexual acts are being performed. In this way, the pimps and lover boys are inescapable. They also use the added degree of separation to emphasize their superiority. Appearing in person to engage the prostitutes in a face-to-face dialogue might make them appear more vulnerable and less superior, thus giving up some level of psychological control. Lastly, they are able to use the cell phones to hide themselves from the public, constantly making efforts to maintain plausible deniability were they to be prosecuted. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

Because of the unfortunately innovative ways in which pimps and lover boys are evading prosecution, it is becoming increasingly difficult to try them for their crimes. Often in order to avoid prosecution, the pimps will now release women if they ask to be released, so that they can make a statement that the women were prostituting voluntarily, even though the psychological control possessed by the pimps clearly negates that claim. If they are prosecuted, the women are often repatriated in their home country, so long as the laws allow it. Some of the women, unable to return to their respective home countries, stay in the Netherlands. Upon repatriation or release, however, many women return to prostitution. In part, because the poverty that often

creates the vulnerability to trafficking initially requires these women to find work again. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

There are two primary reasons in Amsterdam that result in the women's return to prostitution even after being freed from trafficking. The first is that the women know no other reality in their minds. So much of their present life is defined by prostitution that returning to it is the most logical conclusion in their damaged psyches. The second is that employment laws in the Netherlands prevent these women from finding any other employment in the country. Under the Netherlands' current legislation, the visas that these women possess (if they possess any) only permit them to seek self-employment. The only positions of self-employment that are readily available without any significant start-up capital investment are those in prostitution, and so these women return to the trade. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

### **Anti-Trafficking Efforts**

Multiple organizations in Amsterdam aim to eliminate the effects of sex trafficking in the region. Some of these organizations focus on counseling women post-trafficking, while some Christian groups provide Bible studies for the women. One organization with a unique approach to the issue is [Not For Sale](#), an organization founded in the United States that addresses forced labor, organ trafficking, and sex trafficking around the world. In Amsterdam, their focus is sex trafficking. Currently their efforts are centered on the malnutrition that is caused by the diets provided to the prostitutes. Often this diet is no more than potato chips, Red Bull<sup>®</sup>, and cigarettes. A recently launched project, branded [HOME Soup](#) by the organization, has already had success in providing some of these women with more nutritious meals. HOME Soup utilizes recipes that are well-known to the women who grew up with them, hence the name. Not for Sale

has been granted permission by multiple brothel owners to distribute this soup to the women, and, in some cases, provide much needed medical treatment at a facility they rent in the District. According to representatives from Not for Sale in Amsterdam, one long-term goal for the project is to mass market HOME Soup as a brand that will be readily available for purchase in food stores, in the hopes that it will bring awareness to the issue and provide revenue for the project. (S. Wishart, personal communication, February 23, 2012)

The Dutch government has succeeded in prosecuting some brothel owners guilty of trafficking. Saban B, a Turkish brothel owner, was convicted of organizing a trafficking ring centered in Amsterdam. He was [sentenced](#) to 7.5 years for these crimes (“Convicted human trafficker,” 2012). When released for a week to see his daughter he [escaped](#) and now runs a nightclub in Antalya, Turkey, from which he cannot be extradited due to Turkish extradition laws. It is circumstances like these that make trafficking-related prosecutions so unwieldy (“Dutch convict running,” 2010).

## **Stockholm, Sweden**

### **Current Situation**

Sweden has a very unique view on sex trafficking. Since they view “sex work” as a gender equality issue rather than a strictly moral issue, they generally do not differentiate between prostitution and sex trafficking. According to the Swedish government, sex work and trafficking are closely intertwined and cannot be separated. The only differentiation between prostitution and sex trafficking in Sweden is in the legislation. The Swedish people, according to government officials, do not make any differentiation. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication,

March 26, 2012)

[Swedish law](#) defines the issue by saying:

*Prostitution is considered to cause serious harm both to individuals and to society as a whole. Large-scale crime, including human trafficking for sexual purposes, assault, procuring and drug-dealing, is also commonly associated with prostitution. (...)The vast majority of those in prostitution also have very difficult social circumstances.*

(“Legislation,” 2011)

The Swedish model is based on grassroots movements and has shown promising results in effectively combating sex trafficking in the country. However, this has also arguably increased sex tourism from Sweden to the surrounding countries, and has also driven the sex industry “underground” which makes it even more difficult to combat. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012)

### **Historic Policy**

Just as in many places that were heavily influenced by Christianity, Sweden has had laws against prostitution for hundreds of years. Although throughout the mid-1800s the country handed the rights to ban prostitution back over to the local counties who, for the most part, banned the act. However, they actually continued to allow prostitution to continue under heavy police surveillance, as long as the women took proper health procedures, to prevent the spread of venereal diseases (Svanström, 2000). In 1885 the “[Vagrancy Law](#)” was passed to help increase legal employment (since prostitution was not considered legal employment), and then twenty-eight years later the “Lex Veneris Law”, which legally required anyone with a sexually transmitted disease to obtain the free available health care to treat the disease, was passed to help

fight the spread of sexual transmitted diseases (Svanström, n.d.). Both of these laws carried tremendous political weight through the first half of the twentieth century, but in the 1950s the Swedish Parliament began to question the morality of prostitution and consider significantly increasing the strength of the law that officially banned prostitution. The largest backers of this movement to strengthen the law against prostitution were the women representatives to Parliament. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012)

This controversial debate continued through the 1960s with numerous other laws being considered, but nothing of significance ever developed. This solution did not satisfy the public, or women in Parliament who pushed for no prostitution at all. As the public discussed the issue more, the pressure on Parliament to do “something” about the issue only intensified. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012)

In 1998 the “Kvinnofrid Law,” or the Violence Against Women Act, was brought up to be discussed (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012). This law, which is still in place, focused on the criminalization of sex purchasers and has been extremely successful, although it was also exceptionally controversial when it was first brought before Parliament. Since the 1700s, Sweden has influenced anti-sex trafficking laws globally and has become a closely watched international leader in the field, known for their innovative strategies. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012)

### **Current Policy**

Because Sweden views prostitution as a social issue, there is more of a focus on discouraging it and explaining the issues surrounding it to the public than there is arresting and prosecuting traffickers. A survey was created and sent out to all governmental offices to gain

information about suspected sex traffickers or those who are potentially being trafficked. In combination with this governmental survey, there have been poster/ad campaigns condemning the practice of buying sex across the entire country over the course of several years. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012)

Sweden is one of the few locations where steps have been taken to reduce the demand instead of the supply; this is because as the demand for sex services goes down, trafficking and other gender inequality issues will also be diminished. In addition to public awareness campaigns, demand is reduced by enforcing the strict penalties (including prison sentences up to one year) on the sex buyers. In the past year, there have been over 300 arrests of sex buyers in Stockholm County alone, and police are working with the women involved to prosecute traffickers. This is partly due to Sweden's new initiatives in training local police from all across the country to recognize and report trafficked individuals. Although Sweden's law does not allow for internationally trafficked women to remain in-country and receive welfare benefits indefinitely, it does allow for six-month extensions to be made in order to aid in investigations and the immediate well-being of the woman. (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012)

In 2001 and 2002, studies showed that more than [four-fifths](#) of the population supports the legislation, but polls also showed that the public is not entirely convinced that it is effective ("Prostitution," 2004). Arguments against the policy posit that prostitution has been driven further underground and is thus more dangerous, but others argue that there is always violence and injustice involved, no matter how "underground" the industry is. They believe that the government must take the moral stance for social equality and deal with the consequences. While there are some social services available to trafficked and prostituted women for a period



of time, the anti-prostitution policy is also criticized because it prevents health care from being as easily accessed by prostitutes as in countries where it is legal (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012).

Sweden's application of Kvinnofrid Law (and the reduced numbers of trafficked individuals as a result) is catching the attention of other countries, but the Swedish government has not tried to push its policy on other countries (P. Cederlöf, personal communication, March 26, 2012). Instead, the Swedes are happy to present their policies to others, and by 2009 both [Norway](#) and [Iceland](#) adopted similar bans of sex services and [Finland](#) had outlawed buying sex from trafficked individuals ("New Norway," 2009; Sigmarsson, 2009).

According to the National Coordinator Against Prostitution and Trafficking, Patrik Cederlöf (personal communication, March 26, 2012), there is more recent interest in such policies by such countries as Germany, where prostitution is currently legal and thriving.

## **Conclusion**

Although the issue of sex trafficking is complex, there are multiple solutions being implemented across Europe. Differences in cultures and inconsistencies in policy across the affected nations push each region to develop its own solution. For instance, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic have attempted to curb human trafficking through the legalization of prostitution, while Sweden has criminalized the purchase of sex. As long as sex trafficking exists in some form, it is crucial that all the problems and potential solutions are scrutinized for effectiveness. There may never be a consensus on moral issues regarding prostitution, but at the very least there needs to be a unified effort to prevent the exploitation of individuals.

International organizations, such as the IOM, are working towards this sort of unification to

combat human trafficking by establishing offices in as many countries as possible. With a common goal, these offices create specialized methods for prevention according to the region and social climate.

One of the most effective tools for prevention is raising awareness that trafficking still plagues our world today. Many people are not aware that slavery is still present. If knowledge is gained on the issue, the public could then push for more powerful measures to help prevent the spread of sex trafficking. A general public that is more conscious of sex trafficking is capable of forcing new anti-trafficking legislation, donating money to counter-trafficking efforts carried out by non-governmental organizations, and taking part in its own awareness efforts to further the anti-trafficking movement.

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