



Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en
Documentatiecentrum
Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie

Cahier 2015-1a

Prostitution in the Netherlands in 2014

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Cahier

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Contents

1	Introduction — 5
1.1	Reason for the study — 5
1.2	Goal — 6
1.3	Definition of terms — 6
1.4	Research methods — 7
1.4.1	Research into the social position of prostitutes as perceived by prostitutes — 7
1.4.2	Research into non-legal prostitution — 8
1.4.3	Research into policy, supervision and enforcement in the prostitution sector — 9
1.5	Reading guide — 9
2	Legislation and policy — 11
2.1	Legislation — 11
2.1.1	Current legislation — 11
2.1.2	Proposed new legislation — 11
2.1.3	Expectations regarding the WRP — 12
2.2	National policy — 13
2.3	Municipal policy — 14
3	Nature and size of prostitution — 17
3.1	Legal prostitution — 17
3.1.1	Licensed legal prostitution — 17
3.1.2	Non-licensed legal prostitution — 18
3.2	Non-legal prostitution — 19
3.2.1	Non-licensed non-legal operation — 19
3.2.2	Non-legal labour — 22
3.2.3	Underage prostitution — 23
3.2.4	Exploitation — 23
3.3	Means of estimating (developments in) size — 24
4	Supervision and enforcement — 27
4.1	Licensed prostitution — 27
4.2	Non-licensed prostitution — 27
4.3	Obstacles in enforcement — 28
5	The social position of prostitutes — 31
5.1	Employment relationship — 31
5.2	Working conditions — 32
5.3	Income — 32
5.4	Well-being — 33
5.5	Mobility — 33
6	Conclusions and considerations — 35
	Literature — 39

1 Introduction¹

1.1 Reason for the study

On 1 October 2000, an amendment of the law took effect that lifted the general ban on brothels and the ban on pimping in the Netherlands. Since then, forms of prostitution in which adult prostitutes are voluntarily employed are no longer prohibited, under certain conditions. At the same time, a more severe penalisation was introduced of undesirable forms of (the operation of) prostitution and the sexual abuse of minors, partly in order to combat more effectively diverse forms of human trafficking. The law now also puts the administrative responsibility primarily at the local governance level, making municipalities the principal implementing party of the prostitution policy (Daalder, 2007).

In 2006, the law amendment was evaluated by means of three sub-studies commissioned and supervised by the WODC.² The main results of those studies were collated in an overarching report (Daalder, 2007). It emerged that progress had been made with regard to a number of aspects of the prostitution sector, but also that some of the abuses continued to exist.

The licensing procedures appeared to be in order virtually everywhere, and checks were taking place. However, these checks were carried out in varying measure, so that the initial lack of uniformity between municipalities, though reduced, had not disappeared. As a result of the differences between municipalities, escort services in particular were shifting to municipalities with more lenient rules and/or enforcement. Additionally, as much of the police capacity was used for (administrative) checks in the licensed sector, it left less capacity for checks and investigation activities in the non-licensed sector, thus hampering the effort to tackle human trafficking.

Since the 2006 studies, numerous debates have been conducted at various levels (e.g. at the local political level, in parliament and in the media) on how abuses in the prostitution sector could and/or should be tackled. On 10 November 2009, a legislative proposal was submitted for the *Wet regulering prostitutie en bestrijding misstanden seksbranche* ('law regulating prostitution and combating abuse in the sex industry', Dutch acronym: WRP). The WRP aims to tackle abuses in the prostitution sector. It seeks to minimise local and regional differences in prostitution policy, on gaining a better view of and more grip on the sex industry by regulating all forms of prostitution, and by facilitating supervision and enforcement. Important elements of the act include the introduction of a minimum age for prostitutes of 21 years, and the introduction of a national uniform licensing system to safeguard essential aspects of operational management. Municipalities also retain some scope to impose a number of additional demands. The legislative proposal also called for the introduction of mandatory registration for prostitutes and a '*vergewisplicht*' (verification obligation) for customers. However, the Dutch Senate (*Eerste Kamer*) was of the opinion that the mandatory registration for prostitutes

¹ Special gratitude for comments on a draft version of this report to: B. Bieleman, S. Bloemberg, K. Boonstra, M. Boot-Matthijssen, W. van Damme, Y. van Doeveren, R. Hillers, A. Hoogendoorn, G. Lensvelt-Mulders, C. Nieuwenhuyzen, R. Nijkamp, M. Ridder-Wiskerke, M. Timmermans, A. van Wijk.

² For the sub-studies, see: Biesma, Van der Stoep, Naayer and Bieleman (2006), Dekker, Tap and Homburg (2006), Flight, Hulshof, Van Soomeren and Soorsma (2006).

formed an unnecessarily intrusive measure with respect to the prostitutes' privacy, and the customer's verification obligation was neither practicable nor enforceable. The Minister of Security and Justice (*Veiligheid en Justitie*, VenJ) promised to draw up an amendment. At the time of this study, the amendment has been submitted to the House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*), but it is not yet clear when it will be debated. The Minister of Security and Justice has previously promised parliament to provide research into prostitution (Parliamentary Papers II, 2010-11, 32 211, no. 33). Three studies have been carried out, which jointly make good on that promise.³ The current report collates the main findings of these three studies.

1.2 Goal

The goal of this report is to offer insight into the current state of affairs with respect to prostitution in the Netherlands in 2014, with a view to the proposed enactment of the WRP. The study serves as a zero-measurement for the evaluation of the WRP in a number of years, provided that the WRP is indeed enacted. The results of the study can additionally contribute to a careful implementation of the new law.

This report is an overarching and summarising report, in which the main results of the three studies are assembled. There are separate reports that describe each of the three studies and their results more extensively.⁴ The questions that this report will answer, to the extent possible, are:

- How have municipal policy, the supervision and enforcement in the prostitution sector been arranged, and with what results?
- What is the size of the licensed prostitution sector?
- What is the situation regarding non-legal prostitution, and what forms does this take? Where and in what forms do exploitation, underage prostitution and illegality occur, and do we have any idea of the size of this sector?
- How do prostitutes in the various sub-sectors of prostitution perceive their social position, with respect to labour relations, rights and duties, income, mobility, welfare and health and social status?

1.3 Definition of terms

In social debates and scientific publications, the concept of prostitution is used and defined in various ways (Daalder, 2007) and the terms 'prostitute' and 'sex worker' are used alternately. In the sector itself the term 'sex worker' is preferred over 'prostitute', as it puts more emphasis on the occupational nature of the activity. At the same time this term can cause some confusion as 'sex worker' is a broader term than prostitution and can also include sex workers who work in the sex industry, but do not perform paid sexual services with another person, such as performers in erotic shows. This report applies as much as possible the definitions used in the legal process, as the reason for this research derives from the preparations for the WRP. However, the decision to use these terms in no way reflects the opinion of the author of this report, or of the researchers of the three studies, regarding the work and the workers in this sector.

³ See paragraph 1.4 for a description of the studies.

⁴ See: Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans and Homburg (2014), Nijkamp, Sijtsma, Snippe and Bieleman (2014), Van Wijk, Van Ham, Hardeman and Bremmers (2014).

Analogous to the text of Article 1 of the WRP, we use the following definitions (Parliamentary Papers I, 2010-2011, 32 211A).

- Prostitution means making oneself available to perform sexual acts with another person against payment.
- A prostitute is someone who makes himself or herself available to perform sexual acts with another person against payment.
- A sex business is a commercial operation offering the opportunity for prostitution or for the performance of sexual acts for another person against payment, or offering shows of an erotic-pornographic nature in a sex establishment against payment.
- A prostitution business is the operation that consists of offering commercial opportunity for prostitution.
- An escort agency is the operation that consists of offering commercial opportunity for prostitution in the form of mediating between customer and prostitute.
- A sex establishment is a publicly accessible private space, as part of a sex business.
- An operator is the natural person or the administrator of a legal entity or, if applicable, the natural person authorised to represent that legal entity, at whose risk and expense a sex business is operated.

The Regioplan researchers, in the sub-study into the social position of prostitutes, used the term sex worker rather than prostitute, as this was more in keeping with the interviewed target group.

1.4 Research methods

Three studies were performed in the context of this research, commissioned and supervised by the WODC. The methods used in the studies are briefly described in paragraphs 1.4.1 through 1.4.3.

This report is based on the main results of these studies.

1.4.1 Research into the social position of prostitutes as perceived by prostitutes

A Regioplan research team researched the social position of prostitutes as perceived by the prostitutes. To this end, 364 prostitutes were interviewed who work in various sub-sectors of the prostitution sector, namely: window prostitution (n=101); clubs or private houses (n=85); escort (n=71); home prostitution (n=57); massage parlours (n=36) and other sub-sectors, such as SM studios or street prostitution (n=14). Of the respondents, 93% is female, 5% is male and 2% is transgender. Most of the interviews were held face-to-face with prostitutes working at licensed businesses. Only the interviews with independently operating escorts and prostitutes working at home were conducted by telephone. Interviews were held in several languages: Dutch, Spanish, English, Thai, Romanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian.

When possible, the results of this study were compared to the results of the 2006 study into the social position of prostitutes (Dekker, Tap & Homburg). One complicating factor is that the 2014 study interviewed prostitutes who work independently as escorts or at home, while these groups were not part of the 2006 study. Moreover, the respondents in 2006 differed from those in 2014 in a number of respects. For example, the 2006 respondents were comparatively younger. Given the differences between the 2006 and 2014 respondent groups, comparisons between the years are merely indicative.

More information about this research can be found in: Y. Bleeker, L. Heuts, M. Timmermans & G. Homburg (2014). *Sekswerkers aan het woord: De sociale positie van sekswerkers in Nederland in 2014*. Regioplan Amsterdam.

1.4.2 Research into non-legal prostitution

Researchers of IntraVal examined various forms of non-legal prostitution. Four forms of non-legal prostitution are distinguished: non-licensed (non-legal) prostitution, non-legal labour, prostitution by underage persons, and sexual exploitation.

This study consisted of two parts: a general nation-wide part, and a more in-depth part concentrating on four regions, namely: the municipalities of Amsterdam and Eindhoven, the province of Groningen, and the region of North and Central Limburg. Various research methods were used in both parts of the study, enabling a triangulation of results to enhance internal validity.

The general part used desk research consisting, first, of collecting and analysing a large number of reports and documents, part of which were supplied at a later stage by the interviewees. Second, a scan was performed of dozens of advertisement websites and sex adverts on social media and applications, and forums for prostitute users were visited. Subsequently, contact was sought with providers, customers and prostitutes (partly through chat boxes). A number of respondents were then interviewed at greater length. Additionally, institutional informants were interviewed. Finally, registration data was collected that could help form an estimate of the extent of non-legal prostitution. The goal was to link the data and to form this estimate by means of the so-called catch-recatch method. A number of institutes agreed to collaborate and supplied data files: the *Expertisecentrum Vreemdelingen, Identiteit en Mensenhandel* ('expertise centre on aliens, identity and human trafficking'; EVIM), the Chamber of Commerce, and the Anti-Trafficking Coordination Centre (*Coördinatiecentrum Mensenhandel*; CoMensha). Also, the Prostitution and Human Trafficking enforcement teams provided their administrative reports of 2013.^{5, 6}

Desk research was also used in the regional in-depth studies. Over the course of one month, the advertisement sections in national and local daily papers were scanned, and it was checked whether the advertising parties were affiliated with a licensed business.

Also for the nation-wide internet scan, lists of licensed businesses were used to check whether the advertising parties were affiliated with a licensed business. Additionally, a limited number of advertisement websites were analysed over a period of 6 weeks. However, the backbone of the in-depth research was formed by the field work. During the field work and through interviews with involved parties, observations were carried out with the support of an observation programme. Over 180 interviews were held with institutional informants, operators, prostitutes, customers and other involved parties (taxi drivers, hotel porters and such). The researchers were moreover present at a number of administrative controls by the police on behalf of the municipal authority, and at police controls of the non-licensed escort sector, and they performed a number of 'mystery visits' to prostitutes, massage parlours and saunas. The researchers have drawn up an appendix for each of the four in-depth study areas.

⁵ This concerns all the reports of 2013, totalling 224.

⁶ The Tax and Customs Administration was not willing to supply data for the study, despite repeated requests.

This research has been reported extensively in: R. Nijkamp, M. Sijtsma, J. Snippe & B. Bieleman (2014). *Verboden rood in beeld: Onderzoek aard en omvang niet-legale prostitutie in 2014*. IntraVal Groningen-Rotterdam.

1.4.3 Research into policy, supervision and enforcement in the prostitution sector

Researchers of Bureau Beke conducted research into municipal policy regarding prostitution and into the implementation and results of supervision and enforcement. They also examined the nature and size of especially the licensed prostitution sector.

Various research methods were used in this study as well. First, a literature study was conducted. Next, all municipalities in the Netherlands were asked to fill out an online questionnaire. With the aid of various response-enhancing measures, a high response rate was achieved in the end (83%), comparable to the 2006 study among municipalities (Flight, Hulshof, Van Soomeren & Soorsma, 2006). The municipalities were asked to supply relevant documentation to the researchers. These documents (from 59 municipalities) were studied and used as illustration material in the report. Another source of information was formed by the 100 administrative reports made available by the corps experts of the police.⁷ The researchers furthermore interviewed fourteen experts.

On the basis of several criteria, eight municipalities were selected for a more qualitative in-depth investigation of how they deal with policy, supervision and enforcement with respect to prostitution, in practice. These were the municipalities of Alkmaar, Beemster, Deventer, Ede, Enschede, Leeuwarden, Rotterdam and Sittard/Geleen. Here, (group) interviews were held with diverse key informants. In three municipalities, the researchers joined a duty of the supervision and enforcement team to observe supervision and enforcement in practice. The researchers described the practice for all eight municipalities.

For more information on this study, see: A. van Wijk, T. van Ham, M. Hardeman, & B. Bremmers (2014). *Prostitutie in Nederlandse gemeenten: Een onderzoek naar aard en omvang, beleid, toezicht en handhaving in 2014*. Bureau Beke.

1.5 Reading guide

This report describes and combines the main results of the three studies, described in paragraph 1.4, supplemented with information that is relevant for the context. Chapter 2 focuses on legislation and policy. Chapter 3 examines the nature of both legal and non-legal prostitution, what is known about the size of the licensed prostitution sector, and the possibility and impossibility of estimating the non-licensed prostitution sector. Chapter 4 discusses the main findings about supervision and enforcement regarding prostitution. Chapter 5 describes the social position of prostitutes working in licensed businesses or as an independent escort or home worker (differentiated in terms of labour relations, working conditions, welfare and mobility). Finally, a number of conclusions and considerations are formulated in Chapter 6.

⁷ This concerns the ten most recent reports of each police unit. Three-quarters were written in 2013, almost all others in 2014, and two were written in 2012.

2 Legislation and policy

2.1 Legislation

2.1.1 Current legislation

In terms of legislation on prostitution, during the period that this study was conducted the situation largely applied as resulted from the lifting of the ban on brothels as per 1 October 2000. This means that the operation of a prostitution business is legal, unless prohibited by municipal rules through a General Municipal By-law (*Algemeen Plaatselijke Verordening*; APV). At the same time, the new legislative Article 250a (the so-called human trafficking article) came into force in the Criminal Code, which makes all forms of exploitation in prostitution punishable. Additionally, a partial revision of the decency law took effect to increase the protection of minors. Since 2000, several amendments have been made to the human trafficking article. For example, the original words “with a third party” were replaced by “with or for a third party” to also make (commercial) sexual exploitation punishable that does not entail a direct involvement in performed sexual acts (Daalder, 2007). In 2005 the human trafficking article was expanded with other forms of human trafficking, so that exploitation in other labour and services sectors, and certain activities aimed at the removal of human organs, also fall under the scope of this article (National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking, 2005). Further amendments to the human trafficking article have been made recently, which can now be found as Article 273f of the Criminal Code.⁸

Through Article 151a of the Local Governance Act (*Gemeentewet*), municipalities are able to adopt a regulation which prescribes criteria for the commercial arrangement of the opportunity to perform sexual acts with or for a third person against payment, and can thereby pursue a local licensing policy with respect to sex businesses.

With respect to the prostitution of minors, a number of legal articles are significant in addition to Article 273f of the Criminal Code. Article 248b of the Criminal Code offers protection to juveniles aged 16 and 17. This article stipulates that whoever performs sexual acts with someone who makes himself/herself available to perform sexual acts with a third party against payment and who has reached the age of 16 but not yet the age of 18, is punishable. The offender is punishable with a prison sentence of a maximum of four years, or a financial fine of the fourth category. Other articles that offer protection for juvenile prostitutes are Articles 244, 245 and 247 Sr (sex with juveniles younger than 16 years old) (Lindenberg, 2014).

2.1.2 Proposed new legislation

On 10 November 2009, the legislative proposal was submitted on ‘Rules concerning the regulation of prostitution and the fight against abuses in the sex industry’/law regulating prostitution and combating abuse in the sex industry (*Regels betreffende de regulering van prostitutie en betreffende het bestrijden van misstanden in de*

⁸ With respect to the legal context, a relevant quick scan was recently conducted of the criminal responsibilities of the prostitute user regarding human trafficking and underage prostitution (Lindenberg, 2014). The same author is presently working on an analysis of the consistency of the decency law, which also examines a possible explicit criminalisation of pimping (analysis commissioned by the WODC).

seksbranche/Wet regulering prostitutie en bestrijding misstanden seksbranche), abbreviated as WRP (Parliamentary Papers II 2009/10, 32 211, no. 1-2). The core of the proposal is a (tighter) regulation of the sex industry through a national uniform framework for prostitution policy. According to the WRP, the operation of prostitution is prohibited unless the municipality has issued a licence. This licensing system should safeguard essential aspects of the operational management. Another element contained in the proposal is to introduce a minimum age (21 years) for prostitution work. Operators will furthermore be obliged to make their business administration available to regulators, including the data about the prostitutes they employ. The legislator expects that this will give a better view of the prostitutes employed in licensed businesses, and that it will facilitate supervision and enforcement in the licensed sector. Additionally, operators will be obliged to inform prostitutes about their rights and about the available forms of care and support. The legislative proposal also includes a mandatory registration for prostitutes and a verification obligation for customers (who are then obliged to check whether the prostitute is registered).

On 29 March 2011 the legislative proposal was adopted, with some changes, by the House of Representatives, with the support of the CDA, ChristenUnie, PvdA, PvdD, PVV, SGP, SP and VVD. The amended proposal is currently being considered by the Senate (Parliamentary Papers I, 2010/11, 32 211 A).

The mandatory registration and verification obligation are contentious, and there is a lot of resistance from the prostitution sector and care organisations. The Senate is of the opinion that the mandatory registration for prostitutes is unnecessarily intrusive with regard to the prostitutes' privacy, and that the customer's verification obligation is neither practicable nor enforceable. The plenary discussion of the proposal by the Senate on 30 October 2012 was deferred on the request of the Minister of Security and Justice, after the first session. The continued discussion on 28 May 2013 was deferred at the request of the Senate, pending a letter by the Minister of Security and Justice. After receiving the letter on 25 June 2013, the plenary discussion was continued on 8 July 2013. The Strik-motion was adopted on 9 July 2013, calling for an amendment with the effect of removing from the legislative proposal the provisions regarding the mandatory registration for prostitutes and the verification obligation of the customer. Voting on the proposal was subsequently deferred, pending this amendment. The legislative proposal to amend the WRP (33 885) was submitted to the House of Representatives on 5 March 2014.⁹

2.1.3 Expectations regarding the WRP

It emerges from the studies (Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans & Homburg, 2014; Nijkamp, Sijstra, Snippe & Bieleman, 2014; Van Wijk, Van Ham, Hardeman & Bremmers, 2014) that there is widespread support for the goals of the WRP among people that are in some way involved in the sex industry, both in municipal councils and law enforcement and among prostitutes and operators. Positive results are expected particularly from the greater national uniformity. However, there are also concerns regarding a number of aspects of the WRP. One of these is the introduction of the minimum age of 21 for prostitution work. Although people generally welcome the idea of increasing the minimum age, there are concerns for how this will affect those already working in prostitution but who have not yet reached the age of 21. Many therefore advocate a transitional arrangement for prostitutes who are not yet

⁹ See www.eerstekamer.nl/wetsvoorstel/32211_wet_regulering_prostitutie for an overview of the discussion and all associated documents.

21. Without such an arrangement, it is feared that these prostitutes will take recourse to non-legal prostitution. There they are more vulnerable than in the licensed sector as there is less social control, they can benefit less easily from more experienced colleagues, and need to fend for themselves more. They will moreover be harder to find by care givers and less visible for law enforcement. According to the business plan made mandatory by the WRP (Article 24), operators are required to take measures to protect the health, the safety and the autonomy of prostitutes. However, it is unclear for those involved how it can be guaranteed and checked whether this translates into proper information provision to the prostitutes. Many furthermore expect that the WRP will create more uniformity in how commercial prostitution work at home will be defined.

2.2 National policy

Since the ban on brothels was lifted in the year 2000, municipalities have become the main shapers of prostitution policy. Nevertheless, prostitution-related policy continues to be made at the national level as well. An important subject in this regard is the tackling of human trafficking. Here, the Human Trafficking Task Force is an important actor. This Task Force pursues an integral approach to human trafficking, consisting of (a combination of) prevention, care, and an administrative or judicial approach. Parties active in the Task Force are responsible for joint operational actions and for creating the conditions that make such actions possible. Collaboration with the hotel sector has also been intensified to involve the hotel staff in signalling and preventing sexual exploitation (Parliamentary Papers II, 2013/14, 28 638, nr. 105). One of the Task Force's focus points in the third period is to tackle abuses in prostitution. It emerged in 2006 that the campaign *Schijn Bedriegt* ('Appearances are deceptive') had turned up useful information about sexual exploitation (Daalder, 2007). Useful anonymous tips are still being received by Stichting M. At Stichting M, the campaign was expanded and prolonged by one year in June 2014.

The national prostitution programme, in which the Ministry of Security and Justice and the municipalities are represented, was launched to stimulate cooperation and coordination between municipalities. The premise of this programme is that communality and uniformity are required to prevent relocation and waterbed effects, and thus to improve the fight against human trafficking and other malpractices in the prostitution sector. A number of issues addressed by the programme include: establishing the content of the administrative order (*Algemene Maatregel van Bestuur*; AMvB) and the model-APV; exchanging good practices with respect to contact moments with prostitutes; the role and position of care and advocacy organisations; and the creation of barriers against abuses in prostitution by administrative means (Parliamentary Papers II, 2013-14, 28 638, no. 105).

Other activities undertaken by the national government include the funding of quitting programmes (*uitstapprogramma's*) for prostitutes (via the *Regeling Uitstapprogramma's Prostituees*, abbreviated as RUPS) and the creation of an 'opt-in' scheme for the prostitution sector. The evaluation of the abolishment of the brothel ban showed that there is a lot of confusion in the sector about the legal labour position of prostitutes and the possibility of employer-employee relations (Daalder, 2007). The ministries of Finance and Social Affairs & Employment collaborated with the UWV and representatives of operators and prostitutes to clarify the labour relations and legal position of prostitutes. This has resulted, among other things, in an opt-in scheme for the prostitution sector. If an operator subscribes to the opt-in scheme, then he or she enters into an agreement with the

Tax Authority under which the established set of conditions is accepted and must be adhered to. The operator then pays both the VAT and wage tax to the Tax Authority. The State Secretary of Finance submitted the results of an evaluation of the opt-in scheme to the House of Representatives by a letter in November 2014, stating that the scheme will be continued and that information, supervision and enforcement by the government will be developed further, where possible in collaboration with the Regional Information and Expertise Centre (RIEC) (Parliamentary Papers II, 31 066, no. 219).

2.3 Municipal policy¹⁰

Of the municipal authorities responding to the survey, 75% say that they have developed prostitution policy. This is not the case among 23% of the municipalities, and in the remaining small group, policy is under development. Of the municipalities without prostitution policy, most (56%) give as reason that prostitution (as far as they know) does not occur or barely occurs in their municipality. Other municipalities say that prostitution has no to little priority, or that the policy is still under development.

A large proportion of the municipalities that have adopted a prostitution policy did so in 2000 already (43%), which is the year in which the ban on brothels was abolished. In 27% of the municipalities, the (current) policy was adopted in the years between 2008 and 2014.

Various aspects are addressed by municipal prostitution policy. Almost all municipalities with prostitution policy have introduced a licensing system¹¹. In addition, a large proportion of these municipalities has an establishment policy and devotes attention to supervision and enforcement. In a minority of municipalities, the prostitution policy also has attention for prevention and care.

Many of the municipalities with a prostitution policy apply an upper limit to the number of prostitution businesses that may set up shop within the municipality or the region. Incidentally, the number of existing prostitution establishments falls short of the permitted maximum in 65% of these municipalities. The case studies show that there is room for new establishments in a number of municipalities, but that licenses are mainly requested by escort agencies, with very few candidates for site-specific sex establishments.

A zero-policy is pursued in 24% of municipalities. This can be formal policy, meaning that the municipality does not permit the establishment of prostitution businesses, or an effective zero policy, meaning that the conditions for establishment are such that it makes it practically impossible.

With regard to matters of substance, municipal policy mainly focuses on aspects that pertain to the responsibility and the establishment policy of entrepreneurs (in roughly 78% of the municipalities with prostitution policy). In more than half of the municipalities, there is also attention for the health and working conditions of the prostitutes, for combatting human trafficking, and for reducing crime and illegality. A minority of municipalities furthermore devotes attention to the prevention of

¹⁰ The data provided in this paragraph derive from the study by Van Wijk, Van Ham, Hardeman and Bremmers (2014).

¹¹ It is currently still possible for prostitution businesses to operate legally without a license, if they are based in a municipality that does not require a license for that type of business. Once the WRP is enacted this will no longer be possible; the operation of prostitution will then be prohibited unless a license has been granted.

prostitution. The empowerment of prostitutes and quitting schemes receive the least attention (in 16% and 11% of the municipalities, respectively).

In the vast majority of municipalities with a mandatory license system, this license applies to sex clubs, private homes, escort agencies, swinger clubs, erotic massage parlours, sex cinemas and window prostitution (although window prostitution is completely banned in many municipalities). Street prostitution is permitted in just a small number of municipalities. Home prostitution requires a license in just over half (54%) of the municipalities with a mandatory licensing system. Documentation supplied by municipalities shows that the license requirement is often waived for home prostitution, but that conditions are imposed to prevent home prostitution from taking on a business-like character. These conditions vary per municipality, and relate for example to the manner and frequency of advertising and to the operational management (e.g. that only the formal occupant of the dwelling may offer paid sexual services there).

3 Nature and size of prostitution

In the Netherlands, there is a great variety in the types of sex businesses and manifestations of prostitution. Some types of sex businesses have existed for centuries, such as sex clubs and brothels. Other types are relatively new, such as swinger clubs where prostitution takes place and erotic saunas. However, the digitisation of the world has also had an impact on prostitution.¹² This has resulted, on the one hand, in an increase in the making of contact via internet, and on the other in alternative forms of sexual services such as paid webcam sex. In this chapter we first discuss the legal forms of prostitution and then the non-legal forms of prostitution.

3.1 Legal prostitution

Legal prostitution can roughly be divided into two categories. The first category consists of licensed businesses; the second consists of non-licensed businesses established in municipalities that do not require a license for such business ventures (e.g. an escort agency that is based in a municipality that does not require a license for escort agencies) and of independently working prostitutes who do not require a license for this in their municipality (e.g. a prostitute who receives customers at home in a municipality that does not require licenses for home prostitution).

3.1.1 Licensed legal prostitution

Frequently occurring businesses in the licensed legal prostitution sector are window brothels, sex clubs, private homes and escort agencies. Window brothels are the most visible and hence the most noticeable businesses. Customers are recruited from behind a window, meaning that the prostitute is visible from the public road during the phase of customer recruitment. Sex clubs or brothels are private spaces, accessible to the public. In such clubs there is usually a bar room¹³ where customers can choose from among several prostitutes. Private homes are distinct from sex clubs in that they lack a bar and a catering license. Customers can choose from among several prostitutes in a separate reception room. Window brothels, sex clubs and private houses are all so-called site-specific businesses. Escort, on the other hand, is not site-specific. Typical for an escort agency is its mediating role between the customer and the prostitute. Contact is usually established via the internet, social media or by telephone.

Table 1 presents the total number of licenses, differentiated as to type of sex business, valid in the Netherlands as from 1 January 2014 for sex businesses in the municipalities that participated in the survey investigating municipal policy, supervision and enforcement (Van Wijk et al., 2014). For the purpose of comparison, the table also shows the number of sex businesses reported in a similar study in 2006. As the surveys of both years drew high response rates and the municipalities that did not participate are mainly the smaller municipalities without

¹² This is a global trend, see for example *The Economist*, 9 August 2014.

¹³ Sex clubs often have a catering license as well, in addition to the license to operate a sex business.

prostitution businesses, it can safely be assumed that these figures approximate the actual national figures.¹⁴

Table 1 Number of licenses per type of sex business in participating municipalities, in 2006 and 2014^{a, b}

Type of sex business	Number in 2006	Number in 2014
Window brothels	507	195
Sex clubs/private houses/theatres ^c	403	247
Escort agencies	81	125
Erotic massage parlours	54	47
Swinger clubs	19	21
Other	63	39
Total	1,127	674

^a For the year 2014 this table also incorporates the data of sixteen municipalities that had not responded in 2014 but that had indicated in 2006 to have licensed sex businesses in their municipality.

^b Based on data from Flight et al., 2006 and Van Wijk et al., 2014.

^c This category combines sex clubs, private houses, sex theatres and sex cinemas to permit a comparison between 2006 and 2014.

Compared to 2006, the number of window brothels has dropped significantly. To some extent this may relate to a change in the licensing system applied by some municipalities. For example, the licensing policy changed in Amsterdam such that licenses are now granted per business, whereas previously they were granted per window.¹⁵ Nonetheless, a definitive decrease has occurred, in part due to the closure of window brothels in the cities of Utrecht, Amsterdam, Alkmaar, Arnhem and Deventer.

The number of licensed sex clubs, private houses and sex theatres has also decreased. This picture is confirmed by the information obtained in the interviews. The only category of licensed businesses to show an increase is that of escort agencies. This relates to an increase in the number of municipalities that have imposed a licensing requirement for escort agencies.

Aside from the types of companies listed in the table, some municipalities also grant licenses for street prostitution in specifically designated areas (streetwalking or 'tippel' zones). The total number of licenses for street prostitution in the participating municipalities is 159.

There are currently no reliable figures about the number of prostitutes working in licensed businesses.

3.1.2 Non-licensed legal prostitution¹⁶

In the current situation, it is possible for prostitution businesses to operate legally without possessing a prostitution license.¹⁷ This situation occurs if the business operates in a municipality that does not require a prostitution license for that type of business.

¹⁴ Additional information was furthermore collected outside the 2014 survey for the sixteen municipalities that did not respond in 2014 but that had responded in 2006, when they indicated that one or more licensed prostitution businesses existed in their municipality.

¹⁵ Information provided by the municipality of Amsterdam.

¹⁶ The data in this subparagraph are derived from the study by Van Wijk, Van Ham, Hardeman and Bremmers (2014).

¹⁷ This will no longer be possible once the WRP is enacted. The operation of prostitution will then be prohibited, unless a license has been granted.

The survey held among municipalities posed the question whether municipalities have a clear view of the non-licensed prostitution that occurs, and if so, what the size of this sector is. Almost half of the municipalities indicated not to know the number of non-licensed sex businesses, and that it is very difficult to estimate this number. Thus, there are no estimates available for these municipalities. Another 6% of the municipalities indicated that the number is not known, but that they can provide an estimate. A minority of the municipalities says that they know the number either roughly or precisely. All in all, this hampers making a reliable nation-wide estimate. In the municipalities that say they do know the number of non-licensed businesses, the largest category consists of commercial home prostitution. Additionally, in a small number of municipalities it remains possible to legally operate an escort agency without a license, and according to the information provided by municipalities that say they know the number of non-licensed businesses, this occurs to a limited extent.

According to the municipalities, other forms of non-licensed legal prostitution, such as erotic massage parlours, sex clubs, webcam prostitution and prostitution in swinger clubs, occur only sporadically.

3.2 Non-legal prostitution¹⁸

There are various forms of non-illegal prostitution in the Netherlands. This section addresses, successively, non-licensed non-legal operation of prostitution, non-legal employment, underage prostitution and exploitation.

3.2.1 Non-licensed non-legal operation

Paragraph 3.1.2 examined non-licensed legal operation. Most businesses without a license do not operate legally, however. If a sex business operates without a license in a municipality that does require a license for that type of business, then the business is operating illegally.

Various forms of illegal non-licensed forms of prostitution are described in the study by Nijkamp, Sijtstra, Snippe, and Bieleman (2014). The forms most frequently named by involved parties and of which the researchers found actual cases are: commercial home prostitution; escort services; erotic massage parlours; street prostitution outside the designated zones. Forms that appear to occur less frequently are: prostitution at holiday parks and camp sites; hotel prostitution; non-licensed sex clubs and private houses; prostitution in sex cinemas; swinger clubs and saunas. Informants suspect that prostitution may also occur at gay cruising areas and in restaurants and bars, but the researchers were unable to find specific evidence for this.

Non-licensed commercial home prostitution occurs in many places; the researchers encountered this in all regions under examination.¹⁹ Reasons given by home workers to work in home prostitution include that they do not want to pay tax; that they want to work independently and for example determine their own working hours, and that they do not want to conform to the rules set by a club or escort

¹⁸ The data in this paragraph derive from the study by Nijkamp, Sijtstra, Snippe and Bieleman (2014), unless indicated otherwise.

¹⁹ There is actually much confusion about the term 'commercial', which is interpreted differently by the various parties concerned.

agency; that they can put any waiting time to good use at home; and that they don't want to pay the expensive rent for a hired window.²⁰ A number of home workers worked in a licensed sex business previously. Home prostitutes mainly use the internet as means to recruit customers, both via advertisements and via chat functions on a number of websites. The researchers found hundreds of unique advertisements on the internet for the examined regions. However, the offer on internet seems much larger than it actually is. At several non-licensed home prostitutes, the researchers saw multiple phones bearing stickers with different names. This is in line with the assumption that prostitutes advertise on the internet under several names.

A group that partly overlaps with the non-legal home prostitutes is that of the non-legal non-licensed escorts. Some prostitutes work as home prostitute but also provide escort services. Non-legally operating escort agencies sometimes register with the chamber of commerce, but then in a different category such as entertainment. It also happens that escort agencies are registered in a town or city where they do not need a license, but that they mainly provide their services in a place where such a license is required. The latter businesses are operating legally, strictly speaking, as the provision of escort services is not tied to any specific location. Male escorts that serve male customers mainly recruit customers via contact websites for gay men and via apps such as Grindr.

It emerges from interviews, previous investigations, police checks and researchers' observations that prostitution also occurs in non-licensed erotic (generally Chinese and Thai) massage parlours. The extent of this phenomenon varies per region.

Virtually all sex clubs and private houses in the regions under examination appear to have a license. Prostitution in holiday parks and camp sites does occur outside the western urban conglomeration (the 'Randstad'), but infrequently. Hotel prostitution, meaning that a prostitute rents a hotel room and receives customers there, likewise occurs only infrequently. Thanks to a joint effort by the police and the hospitality sector, major steps have been taken in recent years to increase an awareness of the phenomenon among hotel personnel and thereby to combat hotel prostitution. Prostitution appears to occur sporadically in bars and restaurants and nightlife venues; for example, at parties where sexual contacts take place between visitors, some of which may be paid for. The same applies to visitors to sex cinemas. Prostitution may also occur on a small scale in small bar and restaurant establishments with a specific ethnic and fairly closed customer circle, for instance in Turkish tea houses. Street prostitution outside the designated areas is another form of non-legal prostitution which does occur, but not much. The researchers have monitored locations where interviewees said that street prostitution occurs, but saw no or hardly any prostitutes there. Street prostitutes are partly frightened off by camera surveillance and police controls, with the substantial risk of getting caught (and fined). Prostitution is suspected to take place at parking lots along the highway (gay cruising areas). However, the researchers did not find any prostitution activities at places where female prostitutes were said to work. At male encounter sites (parking lots and woods) the researchers did find men who came there specifically for sexual contact with other men, but according to those interviewed at the site these are mainly unpaid sexual contacts. Finally, there appears to be a slight occurrence of prostitution in saunas and swinger clubs.

²⁰ This information is partly based on secondary analyses of the data provided by Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans and Homburg by the author of this report (2014).

Prostitutes working in non-licensed prostitution are mainly Dutch and Central and East European nationals. The massage parlours are mainly operated by Thai and Chinese women. The largest group of street prostitutes consists of addicted Dutch women. Male prostitutes are generally younger than their female counterparts. In Amsterdam they are mainly non-native young males, while outside the Randstad they are mainly native Dutch males.

Prostitutes mainly cite financial reasons to work in non-licensed prostitution. Numerous prostitutes work in both a licensed establishment and a (commercial) non-licensed form. For example, they can work in a licensed club but also receive customers at home or work as an escort via the internet.

Municipalities were asked to what extent they are aware of the presence of illegal sex businesses. Almost half of the municipalities (48%) indicate to not know how many businesses there are, and to not be able to estimate this number either. Two-fifths (42%) of the municipalities say that they roughly know the number of illegal sex businesses. As almost half cannot provide any estimate and only 15% of municipalities say they know the exact number of illegal businesses, we cannot estimate the nation-wide number. The information of the municipalities that say they can estimate or specify the number of illegal sex businesses support the findings of the study on non-legal prostitution that most of the non-licensed and non-legal prostitution occurs in commercial home prostitution, erotic massage parlours and escort services. Moreover, the involved parties say that these sections of the prostitution sector have increased in recent years, and they expect that particularly the flexible forms of prostitution via internet will increase further (just like all forms of sales and services via the internet have increased and will increase further).

The research into non-legal prostitution has attempted to estimate the extent of non-legal prostitution in several ways. First, the offer of prostitutes on the internet was mapped out by examining the total range of advertisements on the eight largest and most popular websites.²¹ The number of prostitutes offered on the internet seems large, but many prostitutes operate under multiple profiles and advertisements, so that the actual number of prostitutes is much smaller than the number of advertisements. Through the researchers' analyses, the amount of over 28,000 different advertisements could thus be reduced to around 8,685 unique phone numbers with which prostitutes (or mediators) advertise on the internet on a random day. Some of these numbers belong to prostitutes working in a licensed business; informants estimate this proportion at 10 to 20%.²² How many prostitutes remain that work in a non-licensed business is hard to say exactly. It emerged from interviews and observation that various prostitutes use multiple phone numbers, so that the actual number of prostitutes is probably smaller than the amount of telephone numbers. On the other hand, a telephone number may belong to a mediator (for example, for non-licensed escort services), giving access to multiple prostitutes. There are moreover prostitutes (mainly male) that do not establish contact by telephone but through a chat box, internal website messages or email. Overall, we may conclude that the number of prostitutes offered on the internet is (much) smaller than it appears at first sight, but the actual number cannot be determined on the basis of advertisements.²³

²¹ Internet is an effective source for research as it emerges from the study that almost all prostitutes and prostitution businesses use internet to recruit customers.

²² This concerns an unsubstantiated estimate.

²³ Internet is a good jumping-off point for an estimate, but to come to an accurate estimate on the basis of this source requires a thorough and work-intensive analysis.

Aside from the internet estimate, it was attempted to make an estimate of the extent of non-legal prostitution on the basis of registrations, by means of the so-called catch-recatch method²⁴. The registrations made available by CoMensha (the Dutch national Coordination Centre Human Trafficking), the Chamber of Commerce, the EVIM and the police (administrative reports) do not satisfy the conditions to be useable as a means of establishing a national estimate of non-legal prostitution through the catch-recatch method, however. The researchers therefore recommend that the registrations be modified in a way to improve the identification of persons within the registrations, so that the files can be collated to arrive at an estimate.

In addition to the methods above, the researchers also looked into possibilities to arrive at an estimate by extrapolating from local estimates and by means of a social network analysis based on police sources. Both methods turned out to not be viable, however.

3.2.2 *Non-legal labour*

A prostitute is said to perform non-legal labour if she originates from outside the European Economic Area (EEA)²⁵ and is not in possession of a valid residence permit that permits the performance of work, or if she works at home without a license in a municipality that requires a license, or if she works outside of areas designated for the purpose, e.g. on the street outside the streetwalking zones (Daalder, 2007). As paragraph 3.2.1 focused on working at home without license and working on the street outside of the designated streetwalking zones, paragraph 3.2.2 will concentrate on the first-mentioned form of non-legal labour. It emerges from interviews, police and administrative controls, reviews of prostitutes on customers' websites and the researchers' observations that this form of non-legal labour rarely occurs in licensed businesses, or in non-licensed and non-legal businesses. Most of the prostitutes originate from the Netherlands and from countries within the EEA, especially Central and Eastern Europe. Asian women are found in erotic massage parlours, but they often have a Dutch partner enabling them to work legally. Since a few years already the number of African, Central and South American women is declining. However, there are women from Central and South America who possess a Spanish passport (and can therefore work legally). Forged passports are sometimes found (e.g. forged Spanish passports among Central and South American prostitutes), or women are suspected of using the passport of a look-alike. Furthermore, prostitutes are occasionally found to stay in the Netherlands on a tourist visa, student visa or under an au pair scheme. All these instances qualify as non-legal labour. Although non-legal labour is not widespread, there are places where this seems to occur more frequently than elsewhere. This applies to erotic massage parlours, home prostitution and non-licensed escort. There may also be some small and more closed circuits (e.g. geared to specific ethnic groups).

²⁴ The catch-recatch method is a method used to estimate hidden populations. It derives from biology, where it is used to estimate population sizes based on the count of animals seen once or multiple times. The method has been applied previously to estimate the number of illegally residing foreigners and to estimate the number of victims of domestic violence.

²⁵ In recent years, the EEA and the scope of association treaties have expanded. As a result, people from an increasing number of countries can work legally in the Netherlands, also as a prostitute. Prostitutes from Romania, for example, can work legally in the Netherlands since 1 January 2014, in paid employment, via the opt-in regulation, or as an independent professional (the latter was already possible previously).

3.2.3 *Underage prostitution*

According to Article 273f of the Dutch Criminal Code, human trafficking is punishable, which includes: to recruit, transport, move, accommodate or shelter a person who has not yet reached the age of eighteen, with the intention of exploiting this person; and to induce this person to make himself/herself available for performing sexual acts with or for a third party for remuneration, or to take any action towards this person which he or she knows or may reasonably be expected to know that this will result in that other person making himself/herself available for performing these acts. It is furthermore punishable to wilfully profit from the sexual acts of another person with or for a third party for remuneration when this person has not yet reached the age of eighteen years. Additionally, a number of legal articles relevant to the protection of minors are contained in Title XIV: Dutch Criminal Code, Offences against Public Decency (see paragraph 2.1.1). Underage prostitution does not seem to occur in licensed businesses. Minors are never found when checks are carried out at licensed businesses. Interviewed prostitutes say that they did not work in licensed businesses before the age of 18, and operators rarely or never receive applications to work from minors. Checks at non-licensed businesses also very rarely find minors. Care providers do sometimes encounter girls that offer sex in return for money or goods, but who do not see themselves as prostitutes. There are some signs of underage girls offering sexual services via the internet. Underage girls are sometimes put under pressure via the internet or social media, for example by the threat of spreading erotic images of them. When underage girls wind up in prostitution, it is often in small networks of customers from the direct environment of the girl or of the probable pimps. In such cases they generally work at home and in non-licensed escort. Police controls of home prostitution and escort have occasionally encountered underage prostitutes.

For the research into the social position of prostitutes, over 360 prostitutes were interviewed who work in licensed businesses or as an independent escort or home worker. Of these prostitutes, 4% was younger than 18 years when they first started out in prostitution (Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans & Homburg, 2014). Some of these originate from other countries, and it is not unlikely that they first started out in prostitution in another country. Ten respondents of Dutch origin started out in prostitution as a minor, but this does not permit for any conclusions regarding underage prostitution in the present time, as those concerned generally started out a long time ago already (the eldest is now 54 years old). One prostitute did start out recently as a minor, having the age of 18 now and having started at the age of 16.²⁶

Underage victims of human trafficking who are taken into care are relatively low educated and sometimes have a slight mental impairment. They generally have low self-esteem and are often responsive to esteem and attention. Given its impact on the victims in particular and on society overall, underage prostitution is a very grave form of non-legal prostitution.

3.2.4 *Exploitation*

The exploitation of prostitutes is viewed as a form of human trafficking and is punishable under Article 273f of the Criminal Code. Of all non-legal aspects of prostitution, exploitation is the most difficult to establish, for law enforcers, investigation officers (police and Inspectorate SZW) and researchers alike. Some

²⁶ This last information is not contained in the report by Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans and Homburg (2014), but is based on secondary analyses of that data by the author of the current report.

victims of exploitation moreover do not see themselves as such. Prostitutes from other countries who are exploited according to Dutch standards are sometimes better off here than in their country of origin, and therefore do not perceive themselves as victim of exploitation. However, exploitation occurs in both licensed and non-licensed prostitution.²⁷ In the licensed businesses, there appears to be a greater awareness of exploitation nowadays, and with that more social control, possibly with a preventive effect. The non-licensed part of the prostitution sector seems more susceptible to exploitation, as there is less control there by either law enforcers or the social environment. In recent years the police have stepped up their control of the non-licensed sector. Few victims of exploitation were found by recent controls in the regions under examination, but that does not mean they don't exist. As said above, it is difficult to establish that someone is being exploited.

The Expertise Centre for Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling (*Expertisecentrum Mensenhandel en Mensensmokkel*) has developed an indicator chart describing five indicators (separately or in combination) of possible human trafficking. These indicators are: multiple dependencies; a strong limitation of the basic liberties of the person involved; poor working conditions; violation of bodily integrity; and the non-incidental nature of the exploitation. The researchers used this classification and the accompanying explanation and examples in their field work.²⁸ In several places they encountered such indicators, with some indicators occurring more frequently than others. However, those involved doubt whether some of the frequently occurring indicators, such as spending the night at the work place and having different work places, are indeed indicators of human trafficking, unless they occur in combination with other indicators. Given the impact of exploitation, both on the victim and on society at large, exploitation is a grave form of non-legal prostitution just like underage prostitution.

To discover prostitutes' own opinion on how to prevent involuntariness, the research into the social position of prostitutes included questions about their views on the voluntariness of their colleagues. Two-thirds of the interviewed prostitutes think that the majority of prostitutes work voluntarily. Almost half of them think that the majority of prostitutes surrender part of their earnings to a pimp. This pertains to prostitutes' own perception, and the term 'pimp' may have been interpreted variously. One meaning of the term is that it involves someone who exploits the prostitute financially and/or in other ways; another meaning is that it is someone who performs certain (work-related) services for the prostitute, and is remunerated accordingly. There did not seem to be any cases of abuse or forced labour among the more than 360 prostitutes that were interviewed (Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans & Homburg, 2014).²⁹

3.3 Means of estimating (developments in) size

The size of licensed prostitution can be determined by collecting data from the municipalities. Moreover, the intended implementation of the WRP will likely result in a better overview of part of the escort sector, through the introduction of a

²⁷ This has become clear in part through several large criminal proceedings against human traffickers in recent years and through recent large-scale investigations.

²⁸ These researchers were trained to understand and apply the indicator chart, but not trained specifically in registering signs of human trafficking.

²⁹ It should be noted however that it is difficult for interviewers to establish a case of coercion through an interview, just as it is difficult to establish for inspectors.

national escort register. Non-licensed prostitution will largely remain out of view, however. The size of this sector will never be known exactly, given the partly concealed nature of this sector. A reasoned estimate is the most we can hope for, for the time being. Paragraph 3.2.1 described the various attempts that have been made to estimate the extent of non-licensed, non-legal prostitution, without leading to reliable results at present. The most promising approach to obtaining a reasoned estimate of non-licensed prostitution is by means of an analysis of internet advertisements. Paragraph 3.2.1 indicated how this requires a substantive analysis effort, both to filter out the licensed businesses and to remove the redundancies and obsolete information (Nijkamp, Sijstra, Snippe, & Bieleman, 2014). One option to explore further is to have all municipalities perform an analysis simultaneously (jointly and perhaps in collaboration with the police), supplemented with random controls. Based on the municipal estimates, it might then be possible to arrive at a national estimate (Van Wijk, Van Ham, Hardeman & Bremmers, 2014).

A second approach to obtaining an estimate of the size of non-licensed prostitution would be by means of estimates compiled by applying the catch-recatch method to multiple registrations.³⁰ However, as said in paragraph 3.2.1., this would require modifying the registration methods of various entities.

³⁰ Using several databases to form an estimate is also referred to as Multiple Systems Estimation, or MSE. This method was applied recently by the British Home Office to estimate the extent of modern slavery (Silverman, 2014).

4 Supervision and enforcement³¹

4.1 Licensed prostitution

Licensed prostitution is often monitored on a periodic basis, at fixed annual moments or otherwise. In addition, inspections are carried out when prompted by reports of nuisance by local residents or, for example, in the context of the granting of building permits.

Within the municipalities, the departments of Public Order and Safety are most closely involved in the supervision and enforcement of prostitution policy, and are usually also the departments in charge. Other departments that often play a role are Building Control and Spatial Planning. In addition, organisations from outside the municipalities are involved in supervision and enforcement. In most cases by far (over 90%), the police are involved in conducting administrative inspections, for which they must have a mandate from the municipality.³² Other commonly involved parties are, among others, the Public Prosecution Service, the Municipal Health Service, the Inspection Service of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and the Tax and Customs Administration. The police teams performing the inspections often know the operators and the prostitutes. They inspect, among others, prostitutes' passports and attempt to determine through conversation whether coercion or exploitation may be involved. Larger inspections are also carried out, which mainly focus on escort prostitution. These inspections involve the police, sometimes in collaboration with the Tax and Customs administration and acting as clients, calling in prostitutes and inspecting their passports upon their arrival, and attempting to determine whether coercion or exploitation may be involved.

In about half of the municipalities, inspections at licensed businesses are occasionally announced in advance; in the other half, this is never done. Few instances of abuse are found during these inspections. According to the municipalities, the high frequency of the inspections and the consequences of the sanctions for operational management are major contributing factors in compliance by operators, as well the operators' own sector-wide standards. According to the municipalities' reports, 116 sanctions have been imposed on licensed businesses since 2010. In 2013, a total of 23 licenses were revoked and 17 requests for licenses were denied, for reasons including conflict with zoning plans and the provisions of the Public Administration (Probity Screening) Act (*Wet Bibob*).

4.2 Non-licensed prostitution

Inspections concerning non-licensed prostitution are also primarily carried out by the police, in collaboration with other organisations or otherwise. Inspections are often carried out regionally, but also occur at municipal and national levels. The goal of the inspections is primarily to identify any minors or coercive situations in the prostitution sector. Appointments can be made with prostitutes for the purposes of inspection using internet advertisements; the police can inspect identity documents

³¹ Except where stated otherwise, the data in this section derive from the study into policy, monitoring and enforcement by Van Wijk, Van Ham, Hardeman and Bremmers (2014).

³² In approximately half of municipalities, however, the police do not have a mandate to carry out administrative inspections.

on the basis of their authority under administrative law (by mandate), and can subsequently take immediate action based on their authority under criminal law if victims of human trafficking are found. In practice, it appears that local and regional inspections primarily take the form of inspections of persons working from home (in a commercial capacity). Administrative inspections often result in administrative reports; approximately two-thirds of municipalities always or often take action based on these administrative reports. According to the municipalities' reports, 190 sanctions were imposed in the non-licensed section of the industry since 2010. In most cases, a sanction involves the issuance of a warning (administrative measure) to a prostitute working without license and non-legally. The administrative inspections occasionally encounter instances of human trafficking.

Large-scale, nationally organised inspections occasionally take place, targeting both escort and home prostitution. During a national action day in 2013, 500 to 600 advertisements were selected (with a view to risk profiles in a human trafficking context). This led to 73 inspections (far less than the number of selected advertisements, among others because telephones are often not answered), resulting in two arrests and in a number of indicators of potential human trafficking. It is, however, difficult for inspectors to determine through a short conversation whether a prostitute is subject to coercion or exploitation.

Organised inspections are also occasionally carried out in specific parts of the sector. In 2012, for instance, an operation was carried out with the help with the Netherlands Forensic Institute as part of the 'The Wall' project', targeting thirteen Chinese massage parlours in Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam. In more than half of the inspected parlours, organic material was found that could indicate the performance of (non-legal) sexual services.

In order to promote an integral and structured approach to combating human trafficking, the *Task Force Aanpak Mensenhandel* ('Task Force against Human Trafficking'), headed by the Public Prosecution Service, was established in 2008. Other participants include various ministries, various municipalities, the police, the National Information and Expertise Centre, the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary, the Association of Dutch Municipalities and the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children. The Task Force's responsibilities are to identify obstacles in the combating of human trafficking, to promote cooperation and to put forward solutions (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, 2013).

4.3 Obstacles in enforcement

The study reveals that not all administrative reports are (or can be) addressed by municipalities. Reports differ per unit in terms of content (level of detail and substantiation) and size. Respondents advocate a universal format that takes into account administrative demands and wishes.

Furthermore, measures (generally in the form of warnings) are primarily aimed at prostitutes who work non-legally. Current enforcement barely reaches operators and facilitators at all. The measures aimed at non-legally working prostitutes (warnings which may be followed by a fine) seem to have limited effect, as warnings are not transferrable to other municipalities.

Furthermore, successful enforcement strategies lead to counter-strategies (as is the case in other areas). This means that continuous innovations in enforcement are

necessary. For instance, escort inspections, which have been held since 2004, have led to increased caution among prostitutes and operators when prostitutes are called to hotel rooms, as a result of which prostitutes do not always show up. The police have responded by holding so-called reverse escort inspections, in which the police visit the premises themselves. This has led to practices in which customers of escort prostitutes are no longer immediately directed to the rendezvous location, but are first directed to an interim location to first check that it is not the police. The increased police attention for the internet can cause providers of prostitution niches, who have a significant interest in avoiding discovery, to move to so-called TOR networks³³ (Nijkamp, Sijtstra, Snippe, & Bieleman, 2014).

A possible obstacle in the near future derives from the establishment of the National Police and the concomitant intention of the National Police to focus on its core tasks.³⁴ This may see the police withdrawing from administrative inspections as a result. The question is whether municipalities have and will make available sufficient capacity, and possess the necessary expertise, to take on this task and to recognise indicators of human trafficking. The risk is that the already limited oversight of non-licensed prostitution will further diminish.

³³ 'TOR' stands for The Onion Router, a special network that anonymises users.

³⁴ A further change is that the combating of human trafficking will become a task for the Aliens Police, whereas it was previously the responsibility of other police departments (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, 2013).

5 The social position of prostitutes

This chapter is based on the study into the social position of prostitutes as perceived by prostitutes themselves (see Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans, & Homburg, 2014). These prostitutes work for licensed businesses and/or work as independent escorts or home prostitutes. The more than 360 interviewed prostitutes originate from 34 different countries. Slightly under half (47%) were born in the Netherlands, 21% are of Eastern European origin, 15% come from Central and South America and 11% are from Asia. 1% of the respondents were 18, 19 or 20 years old. The others were older; the average age varied according to the area of the sector they worked in. In most areas, the average age is between 33 and 36. Home workers and massage parlour prostitutes are older, the average being 39 and 43, respectively. The age at which the respondents began work as prostitutes was of course lower than their current age, with the average lying at 28 and 22% having started prostitution before they were 21. Of this group, 4% had started before the age of 18.³⁵ The respondents were quite experienced; on average they had been working in the sector for 7.5 years.

5.1 Employment relationship

In 2006 there was still widespread confusion in the prostitution sector with regard to labour relations and the position of prostitutes under employment law. Nearly all interviewed prostitutes working for licensed businesses (95%) at the time indicated that they were independent workers, while in reality operators were often involved in the prostitutes' work to such an extent that their relationship was actually one of authority (Daalder, 2007). Through consultation between the Tax and Customs Administration and the operators, a so-called opt-in arrangement was created in 2009. Since then, prostitutes have three options: to work independently; in paid employment with a business operator; and to work for a business operator under a series of conditions (opting in). The operator must in the latter case have an agreement with the Tax and Customs Administration and satisfy the associated conditions.³⁶ In clubs, private houses and massage parlours, the opt-in arrangement has become quite integrated. Of all respondents working in clubs and/or private houses, 82% indicated that they worked under the opt-in arrangement; in massage parlours, this figure was 94%. Of home workers and window prostitutes, 100% indicated that they worked independently, and in the escort sector 73% indicated the same. Only 3% of all respondents said they worked in paid employment. In general, the respondents (79%) were satisfied with their labour relationship. Reasons for dissatisfaction were the absence of pension accrual and the high rent of their work premises. Agreements are made on various aspects between prostitute and operator, employer or window owner. Some of these are mainly determined by the prostitutes themselves (e.g. choice of customer, services to be performed, clothing worn during work, working hours). The part of their income that goes to the employer or operator is determined in more than 80% of all cases by the employer/operator. The rent of the work place and the prices that customers pay are also largely determined by the operator/employer/window owner. For prostitutes, some aspects are more important to determine themselves than others;

³⁵ For a detailed analysis of this group, see section 3.2.3.

³⁶ Cf. section 2.2.

most important is that they can choose what customers to work with and what they charge for specific sexual acts.

5.2 Working conditions

The average number of hours that prostitutes work per week varies greatly and differs per sections of the sex sector. Prostitutes working in window prostitution work the largest number of hours a week, 43 on average. Escort prostitutes work least hours – on average, 11 hours a week. It should be noted here that the meaning of 'working hours' can vary, since window prostitutes have waiting times that must obviously be counted as working hours. The number of waiting hours counted as working hours is limited for, especially, prostitutes working as independent escorts and home prostitutes.

Most respondents (88%) preferred working under an employer or operator who holds a license, primarily for reasons of safety. Other matters that play a major role in working place choice are the attractiveness of the work place, expectations of higher income than elsewhere, and the presence of a good employer or operator. The majority of the respondents are satisfied with their work activities. Reasons include independence, good relations with colleagues, and a good relationship with the employer/operator. Reasons for dissatisfaction include low earnings and too few customers. Window prostitutes were most dissatisfied about their income. Approximately half of the respondents said they knew where they could find assistance in case of problems with operators or employers. It should also be noted that nearly all respondents feel that the safety and hygiene of workplaces could be improved.

5.3 Income

Income in the prostitution sector varies enormously. Aspects that have a part in determining income are the rates charged to customers, the costs of, for instance, room rent, the percentage that accrues to the operator or employer, and the number of working hours. Home workers and escort and window prostitutes often determine the rates they charge their customers themselves and can generally keep the whole of their income (although they do have expenses to pay, such as window rent). In clubs, private houses and massage parlours, the operator or employer usually determines the rates charged and prostitutes are usually paid a fixed percentage per customer. The prostitutes were asked to estimate their weekly income after payment of taxes and rent. Due to variation in income, it was often difficult for the respondents to indicate their average income, and not all respondents were prepared to provide an estimate. Nonetheless, 270 respondents provided categorical estimates. A large number (43%) of the respondents made less than €250 a week from their activities. Among home workers, this applied for as much as 63% of respondents. It is important to recognise in this context, however, that on average home workers worked in prostitution for only sixteen hours a week, and that 37% of them also had a job outside the prostitution sector. Of the respondents, 6% earned more than €1,000 net a week; this applied for 10% of escort prostitutes. Window prostitutes, at 43 hours weekly, had the longest working hours, yet three quarters of them said that their net earnings amounted to less than €500 a week.

5.4 Well-being

The life style of prostitutes is on average less healthy than that of the average Dutch person. Compared to the Dutch public (or, insofar as possible, to Dutch women)³⁷ prostitutes smoke more, use more drugs (soft and hard), drink more alcohol and use slightly more sedatives. Furthermore, they are less active in sports. Compared to 2006, there appear to have been improvements with regard to, among others, smoking, alcohol use, and sports. A number of the responding prostitutes indicated that they experienced tension, dejection and loneliness. 40% occasionally found themselves in distressing situations as a result of their work, of which the most common effects were disturbing thoughts and sleeping difficulties. Nearly half of the prostitutes stated that they sometimes perceive their work as emotionally difficult. A large majority said they knew where to go to obtain assistance in healthcare matters.

Most respondents feel that they have been treated well in the past year by various organisations, such as the Municipal health Service, their family doctors, the vice squad, the Chamber of Commerce and banks. They feel comparatively less well treated by the Tax and Customs Administration, the Employee Insurance Agency and social services. Nonetheless, two-thirds of the respondents feel that they are treated well by these organisations as well. However, although the respondents themselves had positive experiences with various organisations, they do consider it important that more effort is made to improve the treatment of prostitutes by authorities and the reputation of the profession among the public and organisations. At the same time, a majority finds anonymity to be very important, both in their contacts with organisations and with regard to their families, friends and acquaintances from whom they conceal the nature of their work.

5.5 Mobility

The reasons behind the choice to start working as a prostitute are primarily financial, although there was also a substantial group (27%) that indicated they chose the work because 'it seemed like fun'. This was most common among escort prostitutes (47%) and home workers (37%). 4% of the respondents indicated that they had been persuaded by someone else to take up prostitution; this was most common among window prostitutes (8%).

The large majority of respondents had held a job outside prostitution previously. In window prostitution, relatively many of the respondents (25%) never had another paid job. Approximately a quarter currently holds another paid job in addition to their prostitution work. This occurs most frequently among escort prostitutes (45%) and home workers (37%), and is least common among those working in massage parlours (11%) and window prostitution (12%). About half of the respondents say that they sometimes considered quitting their work as prostitutes, and over half has actually quit prostitution at least once. About half of the respondents say they know where to obtain assistance if they wish to quit their work as prostitutes, but of those who had stopped at least once, almost none had used the services of support agencies. Most had stopped without any help, and a smaller group had stopped with the support of family, friends or acquaintances. Most commonly, it was financial reasons that prompted a return to prostitution.

³⁷ Statistics Netherlands and the National Drug Monitor were used as sources for national figures; see Bleeker, Heuts, Timmermans & Homburg, 2014.

Prostitutes regularly switch to new places of work. The respondents had spent three years on average at their current place of work³⁸, and so far had worked at three different work places in the sector, on average. The most commonly quoted reasons for changing work places were: that the income was too low, a wish to try out a different place of work, and problems with the operator or employer. Approximately 20% (primarily home workers and escort prostitutes) had another place of work in the prostitution sector in addition to the place of work where they were interviewed.

³⁸ The average was highest among home workers, followed by window prostitutes.

The average was lowest among prostitutes working in massage parlours, followed by those working in clubs and private houses.

6 Conclusions and considerations

Policy

A clear majority of the municipalities has developed prostitution policy, which almost always entails a licensing system with a compulsory license for sex clubs, private homes, escort agencies, swinger clubs, erotic massage parlours, sex cinemas and window prostitution (although the latter is prohibited in many municipalities). Street prostitution is prohibited almost everywhere and is also not tolerated. The position of home prostitution varies considerably per municipality. In almost half of the municipalities, commercial home prostitution requires a license, but the conditions according to which home prostitution is considered a commercial business varies per municipality and are not always clear to those involved. A large proportion of the municipalities applies a maximum number policy, but since the actual number of businesses in a some municipalities falls short of that number, there is room for new businesses as far as available licenses is concerned. However, the establishment of new businesses (and thus also innovation through e.g. other organisation forms) tends to be hampered in practice by conditions for establishment.

Enforcement

In both the licensed and non-licensed sections of the sector, inspections are generally conducted by or under supervision of the police. Virtually everywhere in the country, periodic inspections of licensed businesses are carried out in which the police check e.g. prostitutes' passports and attempt to determine through conversation whether any coercion or exploitation occurs. Few abuses are encountered in these inspections. The frequency of the inspections seems to have an important positive impact on operators' willingness to adhere to the rules (and it thus seems important to maintain this frequency of inspections). Inspections in the non-licensed sector often start from advertisements on the internet. Occasionally, large-scale (regional or national) actions are carried out with regard to both escort and home prostitution, or to specific components of the sector such as massage parlours.

Obstacles in enforcement

The police regularly compile administrative reports about the inspections, but this does not necessarily result in administrative measures. Measures (mainly warnings) are mainly aimed at non-legally working prostitutes and less at operators and facilitators. One complication hampering enforcement is that successful enforcement strategies lead to contra-strategies (as happens with other forms of criminality as well), so that innovation in enforcement is continually required. It remains unclear, incidentally, how the establishment of the National Police will affect the role of the police in supervision and enforcement in the prostitution sector, and hence for the awareness of possible abuses.

Size of legal prostitution

Legal prostitution consists of licensed prostitution and non-licensed but legal prostitution.

According to data provided by the municipalities, in the Netherlands there are currently 674 licensed sex businesses. The number has dropped compared to the count of 1,127 licenses in 2006. Window brothels, sex clubs and private homes are the most frequently found businesses. It is also among these sector components that the strongest decline occurred.

Non-licensed legal prostitution mainly consists of independently working home prostitutes in municipalities that do not require a license for (commercial) home

prostitution. Aside from home prostitution, non-licensed legal escort agencies occur in the small number of municipalities that do not require escort agencies to be licensed. There is no clear view of legal non-licensed prostitution within municipalities; less than half of the municipalities say they have figures on the number of non-licensed businesses. If the WRP is implemented, it will become possible to form an estimation of the number of prostitutes working in the licensed businesses on the basis of the company administrative files.

Non-legal prostitution

Of the various forms of non-legal prostitution, non-licensed prostitution occurs most frequently. The most common forms are commercial home prostitution and escort, followed by erotic massage parlours and, in some places, street prostitution outside the designated streetwalking zones. Other, less common forms are prostitution at holiday camps and camping sites, hotel prostitution, non-licensed sex clubs and private homes, and prostitution in sex cinemas, swinger clubs and saunas. In addition, there may be a number of small closed networks that are barely accessible for the police and researchers alike. Customers for home prostitution and escort are mainly recruited via the internet, both through advertisements on sites and through chat boxes.

Non-legal labour in the form of prostitutes from outside the EEA without the residence permit required to perform labour barely occurs in licensed businesses, and not much in non-licensed businesses either. As the EEA has steadily expanded over the course of years, Central and Eastern Europe – where many prostitutes originate from – are now a part of the EEA. South and Central American prostitutes often possess a Spanish passport and Asian prostitutes often have a Dutch partner, permitting them to work legally.

One form of non-legal prostitution with major personal (and social) consequences is underage prostitution. This does not seem to occur in licensed businesses, and inspections of non-licensed companies likewise rarely encounter juveniles. It is likely that juveniles that do end up in prostitution (for example under pressure of the threat of spreading erotic images obtained via social media) mostly come to work in small networks with customers from the direct environment of the juvenile and/or the probable pimps.

Of all the non-legal forms of prostitution, exploitation is the most difficult to establish for both the police and the researchers. It also happens that prostitutes who are exploited according to Dutch standards do not see themselves as a victim of exploitation. Exploitation occurs in both the licensed and the non-licensed sections of the sectors. The awareness of exploitation and hence the social control does seem to be growing in the licensed sector.

Estimates of non-legal prostitution

As non-legal prostitution is largely hidden from view, the size of this phenomenon will never be known exactly.³⁹ However, prostitutes will always need to recruit customers and as this is generally done via the internet, this would seem to be the best source of obtaining information as the basis of a reasoned estimation of the size. As part of the research into non-legal prostitution, the researchers explored in what ways the offer on internet can serve as basis for estimation. It turned out that the offer on the internet is several times larger than the actual offer. The more than 28,000 different advertisements for prostitutes found by the researchers were reduced, by analyses, to around 8685 unique telephone numbers with which

³⁹ The lack of a reliable estimate of the size of non-legal prostitution is not unique to the Netherlands. There is a lack of reliable estimates worldwide. Estimates that are presented are generally substantiated very poorly. For this problem, see for example Weitzer, 2013.

prostitutes advertise on the internet, on a random day. The number of prostitutes working in non-licensed businesses is smaller, since some of these phone numbers belong to prostitutes working in a licensed business. It has moreover emerged through interviews and observations that prostitutes (and escort agencies) often operate under multiple phone numbers and profiles. Other complicating factors are outdated information on the internet (numbers no longer in use), that a phone number can belong to mediator who offers access to multiple prostitutes, and that (mainly male) prostitutes recruit customers through a chat box, internal website messages or email. The researchers have therefore still to arrive at a robust estimate, based on internet data. It has become clear, however, that the number of prostitutes that offer their services via the internet is (much) smaller than suggested by the amount of advertisements. If such advertisements are used in the future to estimate the size of non-legal prostitution, then this will require an extensive (and work-intensive) analysis effort. An option might be to do so in several municipalities simultaneously and then to combine the results.

An estimate of the size of non-legal prostitution using the catch-recatch method based on registrations is currently not feasible. If registrations are modified in such a way that e.g. the identification of persons becomes possible, then such an estimate might be possible in the future.

Perceived social position of prostitutes

Most prostitutes in the licensed businesses are satisfied with the employment relationship. They prefer to work at a licensed business, mainly on account of safety. The actual arrangement of the employment relationship varies per sub-sector. Most of the prostitutes working in licensed businesses as well as independently working escort prostitutes and home prostitutes are satisfied with how they can perform their work. This satisfaction is influenced positively through good relations with colleagues and/or the employer and by being able to work independently, and is influenced negatively by the (high) rent of the work place. The prostitutes are generally satisfied about their personal experiences in dealing with various social entities, though they do feel that their treatment overall and the image of the occupation among institutions and citizens require improvement. Although prostitutes' health and well-being have improved somewhat compared to 2006, they fall below those of the general population. Almost half of the prostitutes who work in licensed businesses or as independent escort or home worker finds the work emotionally taxing at times, and more than one third occasionally encounters harrowing situations in consequence of the work.

Some concluding considerations

Many of the parties concerned, in all roles (such as prostitutes, operators, enforcers and care providers), endorse the goals of the WRP. There is widespread support for the effort to combat human trafficking and abuses in prostitution, for more uniformity in policy and regulations, and for introducing the minimum age of 21 for prostitutes. At the same time, many of the parties have concerns. An important point of concern is the position of prostitutes who have not yet reached the age of 21. Many advocate a transitional arrangement for those who are not yet 21 years old but already working in prostitution, if the WRP is implemented and the age limit takes effect. There is a concern that, in the absence of such a transitional arrangement, these prostitutes will take recourse to non-legal prostitution, where they will need to look after themselves with a lack of social control and out of reach for care providers. Another point of concern pertains to the manner of checking how operators properly fulfil their responsibilities with respect to protecting the health, safety and self-determination of prostitutes. It is furthermore unclear how the WRP will achieve more uniformity with regard to defining commercial home prostitution.

The studies identify the window prostitutes as a potentially extra vulnerable group with respect to self-determination and autonomy. They say less frequently than other prostitutes working in licensed businesses or as independent escorts or home workers that they started out in this occupation because it seemed fun to them, and more frequently that they did so for financial reasons or because someone persuaded them or advised them to do so.⁴⁰ Also, the proportion of foreign women working in window prostitution is relatively high (81% of the interviewed prostitutes in window prostitution originated from outside the Netherlands). The decline in the number of window brothels has moreover resulted in increased rental prices and unfavourable conditions for prostitutes (particularly in Amsterdam⁴¹), so that they often have to work long hours and work intensively in order to pay the rent. This picture is confirmed by the fact that, with an average of 43 hours a week, they have the longest working week by far, compared to prostitutes working in other licensed businesses or as independent escort or home worker. An increase in the number of windows is not anticipated. There are few premises where window prostitution is permitted under the zoning plans. If the owner of a building is rejected by the Bibos screening, then it is often difficult in practice for an operator to set up business in that building. This is a serious impediment to innovation in the sector, for example the creation of prostitutes' collectives.

Recent years show a declining trend in traditional forms of prostitution businesses such as sex clubs and private homes. Flexible forms, in which independently working prostitutes recruit their customers via the internet and social media, are increasing. This trend is not unique to the prostitution sector but is in line with the increase in the sale of goods and services via the internet, and the increase in the number of self-employed professionals ('ZZPs')⁴² in other sectors of Dutch society. This trend is expected to continue over the coming years. This complicates supervision and enforcement, but on the other hand it seems to offer opportunities for prostitutes wishing to work independently, without the interference of an operator, and thus for them to achieve more autonomy. Compared to prostitutes working in licensed businesses, independently working escorts and home prostitutes indicate relatively often that they started in prostitution for a positive reason (because the work seemed fun to them), and one of the reasons given for working at home is that they wish to choose their own working hours and that they don't want to conform to the house rules of a club or escort agency. With a view to combating (serious) abuses in the sector and to tackling human trafficking, it is therefore debatable whether the scarce capacity available for inspections in the non-licensed sector should be devoted mainly to home workers, as is the case at present.

⁴⁰ The large-scale investigations conducted in recent years found that victims of human trafficking were regularly forced to work in window prostitution.

⁴¹ This finding is based in part on information provided by the municipality of Amsterdam.

⁴² See for example www.cbs.nl.

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