

Another year of COVID-19

A follow-up report on the handling of the pandemic and persons who sell sex in Norway and the Nordic countries



Pro Sentret is Oslo Municipality's health and social service provider for persons who sell sexual services, and a national centre of expertise on prostitution. This report was prepared by Ida Kock.

Pro Sentret / Velferdsetaten 2021

ISBN 978-82-93361-95-4

Content

NORSK OPPSUMMERING	4
INTRODUCTION	7
ABOUT THIS REPORT	7
THE NORWEGIAN CONTEXT: IMMIGRATION REGULATION AS DISEASE CONTROL	9
CONTAGION INVASION	9
DUGNAD: DISEASE CONTROL THROUGH INDIVIDUALISATION OF STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS?	10
CONTAGION BOMBS AND A THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH: IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES AND PERSONS WHO SELL SEX	11
FURTHER RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVEL AND ENTRY	13
REACTIONS FROM PRO SENTRET AND OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS	13
AFTERMATH: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GUIDE FOR PERSONS WHO SELL SEX	15
TESTING AND VACCINATION OF PERSONS WITHOUT RESIDENCY	15
EXPERIENCES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS	17
NORWAY	17
PRO SENTRET	17
NADHEIM	18
SYKEPLEIE PÅ HJUL (NURSES ON WHEELS)	19
ALBERTINE	20
FRI	21
PION	22
SWEDEN	22
MUNICIPAL SERVICE PROVIDERS	23
OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS	24
MEMBER- AND NETWORK ORGANISATIONS	27
DENMARK	28
REDEN	29
AMIAMI	31
SEXARBEJDERNES INTERESSEORGANISATION (SIO)	32
FINLAND	33
PRO-TUKIPISTE	33
THE WAY AHEAD	35
REFERENCES	37

Norsk oppsummering

Koronapandemien har nå vart i over 1,5 år og selv om vi nå øyner en ende på det hele med vaksiner og synkende smittetall vil nok pandemien prege samfunnet i lang tid fremover.

De første månedene av pandemien var kaotiske med stadig endringer i restriksjoner, smittesituasjon og myndighetens generelle håndtering av pandemien. Selv om mer kunnskap og erfaring har ført til tydeligere retningslinjer og bedre kommunikasjon fra myndighetenes side preges håndteringen fortsatt av uklarheter og manglende retningslinjer hva angår salg av seksuelle tjenester. Noen utfordringer har blitt håndtert, men det meste har tatt tid og være mangelfullt på måter som har rammet mennesker som selger sex hardt. Erfaringene vi og andre som jobber med mennesker som selger sex i Norden har vist at myndigheten ikke har klart å inkludere denne sårbare gruppen på en tilstrekkelig måte i sin håndtering av pandemien.

Sommeren 2020 kom Pro Sentret med rapporten *Oversett og etterlatt. Om Covid-19 pandemien og smittevernberedskap for personer som selger sex* (engelsk versjon: *The exclusion of persons who sell sexual services in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences from the field in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark*). Rapporten oppsummerer de første månedene av pandemien. Denne rapporten tar for seg perioden juni 2020 til juni 2021.

Rapporten baserer seg på intervjuer og spørreundersøkelser med bruker- og interesseorganisasjoner og hjelpetiltak i Norden. Rapporten redegjør også for Pro Sentres kontakt med myndigheter og den tar for seg det offentlige ordskiftet rundt personer som selger sex og migranter.

Det er særlig regler om angår migrasjon, antallet tillatte nærkontakter for privatpersoner og regulering av en-til-en næringsvirksomhet som har hatt størst innvirkning på mennesker som selger sex. I perioder har salg vært eksplisitt forbudt, mens det i andre har vært mer uklart hvilke regler og restriksjoner mennesker som selger sex må forholde seg til. Politiets håndtering av nye reguleringer har også medført uforholdsmessig stor belastning for mennesker som selger sex. Vi har også erfart at mennesker som selger sex ofte rammes av innstramminger uten å ha mulighet til å nyte godt av kompensasjonsordninger og tiltak som har som mål å veie opp for de ulempene koronarestriksjonene medfører. Restriksjonene har også medført store omlegginger og begrensninger i arbeidet til hjelpetiltakene for denne gruppen.

I media har mennesker som selger sex blitt omtalt som potensielle smittebomber av politiadvokat Andreas Meeg-Bentzen og en trussel mot folkehelsen, dette på tross av at det ikke er dokumentert noen utbrudd i forbindelse med salg av seksuelle tjenester. Fokuset på de som kjøper sex har vært helt fraværende. Ordet «importsmitte» har også blitt flittig brukt om migranter, i kombinasjon med invasjonsmetaforer kan dette ha fyrt opp under fremmedfrykt og rasisme i det norske samfunnet.

Politiet har allokert en del av sine frigjorte ressurser til å slå ned på prostitusjonsmarkedet blant annet ved å sende meldinger til kvinner som annonserer på eskortesider og ved å utgi seg for å være kunder. Mange har også blitt bortvist eller utvist av landet. Enkelte oppgir i møte med hjelpetiltakene at de har fått enda mindre tillit til politiet og at de avstår fra å anmelde til dels grov vold og ran i frykt for å bli bortvist og utvist fra landet. Frykten for å bli sendt ut av landet kan ha medført at folk ikke tester seg for korona.

Våre informanter melder om stor nedgang i antallet annonser for salg av seksuelle tjenester og et sterkt redusert utemarked. Nedgangen i etterspørsel har presset prisene ned og flere tilbyr også nye tjenester som sex uten kondom. En del har forsøkt å flytte mer av virksomheten sin over på netjtjenester som OnlyFans, men mange har opplevd dette som mer utfordrende enn de forventet.

Mange har havnet i en økonomisk vanskelig situasjon der også det å reise hjem har vært umulig for mange grunnet restriksjoner på reise, og det faktum at mange ikke bor der de har permanent opphold. Hjelpetiltakene og brukerorganisasjonen PION har etterspurt økonomisk støtte til gruppen uten at dette har medført noen tiltak fra myndighetens side. Flere hjelpetiltak har i perioden bistått mange brukere med hjelp til å søke økonomisk bistand og flere har også levert ut matposer til de mest trengende. Mange ansatte har måtte jobbe på hjemmekontor, noe som har medført mindre en-til-en oppfølging av brukere.

Selv om det har vært en nedgang i antallet mennesker som selger sex, er det flere av hjelpetiltakene som har fått kontakt med nye brukere som har begynt å selge sex fordi de har blitt permittert eller oppsagt fra sitt ordinære arbeidsforhold. Det er også flere som har begynt å selge sex igjen grunnet en vanskelig økonomisk situasjon. Flere brukere oppgir stor grad av ensomhet, isolasjon og håpløshet, og at situasjonen totalt har hatt en negativt effekt på deres mentale helse.

I Norge har utkastelsen av mennesker som selger sex, politiets metoder og myndighetens håndtering av feltet fått en del medieoppmerksomhet.

Medieoppmerksomheten, og tjenesteytere og interesseorganisasjoners arbeid ovenfor myndighetene har ført til at vi har fått på plass retningslinjer for smittevern ved salg av seksuelle tjenester. Den økte oppmerksomheten, og bevisstheten rundt gruppas særlige utsatthet i krisesituasjoner, håper vi vil føre til at myndighetene avklarer ubesvarte spørsmål rundt salg av seksuelle tjenester, og at mennesker som selger sex og migranter blir inkludert i fremtidige krise- og beredskapsplaner. Som eksempel kan vi trekke frem at norske myndigheter i løpet av et knapt år både har behandlet mennesker som selger sex som et foretak som må rette seg etter regler for bedrifter, og som privatpersoner som må rette seg etter regler for privat nærkontakt. Dette viser et behov for tydelige retningslinjer og juridisk avklaring hva angår salg av seksuelle tjenester.

Mennesker som selger sex har blitt rammet hardt av pandemien og restriksjonene som fulgte av den. Myndighetene i de Nordiske landene har ikke klart å nå gruppen med effektive tiltak, økonomisk bistand eller tydelig og tilgjengelig kommunikasjon rundt regler og restriksjoner. Mennesker som selger sex er dog inkludert i de Nordiske landenes vaksinasjonsprogrammer uavhengig av oppholdsstatus.

Introduction

By the time of the publishing of this report, we have lived with a global pandemic for around 18 months and it will continue to affect us for months or years to come. The first few months of the pandemic were confusing times with many regulations that directly and indirectly affected people who sell sex. In the summer of 2020, Pro Sentret published the report *The exclusion of persons who sell sexual services in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences from the field in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark*.¹ The report dealt with the experiences of Pro Sentret and other service providers in Norway and the Nordic countries during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report is a follow-up on the report from 2020 and covers the period June 2020-June 2021.

Marginalised groups tend to be both overlooked and more severely affected in times of upheaval. This has also been the case for people who sell sex during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first report showed how persons selling sex were excluded in the initial handling of the pandemic, and a lack of concrete regulation and guidelines for this group. It also highlights some of the more unintended effects of the COVID-19 pandemic such as increased police activity and the consequences from a stricter migration policy. Migration policy in particular, highly affected persons who sell sex due to the fact that most of the people selling sex both in Norway and in the Nordic countries are migrants.

Although the pandemic is still ongoing by the time of the publication of this report, history has shown that memories tend to be short, especially when marginalised and vulnerable groups are concerned. The report is a contribution to future assessments of the Norwegian handling of the pandemic in relation to vulnerable groups. Through the efforts and experiences made by service providers, we wish to show how the pandemic and the government's handling of it has affected persons who sell sex in Norway and the Nordic countries. The report also emphasizes how public discord, both media coverage and framing, in combination with authorities' communications, affects people selling sex.

About this report

A central aim of this report is to document service providers' work during the crisis, both concerning the restrictions placed by the pandemic and their work with service

¹ Pro Sentret, 2020. *The exclusion of persons who sell sexual services in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences from the field in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark*. Pro Sentret/Velferdsetaten: 2020.

users. Also, we have contacted member and network organisations for and by persons who sell sexual services to document their experiences.

Experiences from Pro Sentret have been collected mainly through monthly reports from staff. For other service providers in Norway and the Nordic countries, a survey was sent out via e-mail that could be answered either in written form or via telephone or Microsoft Teams. A survey was also sent to the Norwegian and Nordic member/network organisations for and by persons who sell sex.

The Norwegian and Nordic service providers who have responded to the survey are: *Nadheim Oslo* and *Sykepleie på hjul* in Oslo; *Nadheim Trondheim*, *FRI* in Bergen and *Albertine* in Stavanger. The Swedish service providers who have responded are *Mika Gothenburg*, *Evonhuset* (Malmo), *Noomi- Hela människan* (Malmo) and *Ellencentret/1000 möjligheter* (Stockholm). From Denmark *Reden Aarhus*, *Reden Odense*, *Reden emergency shelter*, *Reden International* and *AmiAmi* in Fredericia, Jutland answered the survey, as well as *Pro-Tukipiste* in Finland. The member/network organisations by and for persons who sell/have sold sex that has responded are *PION* (Norway), *Sexarbejdernes interesseorganisation* (Denmark), *Red Umbrella Sweden* (Sweden) and *Inte din hora* (Sweden).

In the first part of the report, we discuss the handling of the pandemic and its consequences for persons who sell sex with a particular focus on immigration policies. In the second part, we present the experiences from Pro Sentret, and other Norwegian service providers. Finally, in the third part, Nordic service providers and rights organisations are presented per country, starting with introducing the respective national disease control measures and a summary of legislation on prostitution.

The Norwegian context: Immigration regulation as disease control

Norway has had some of the strictest entry and immigration regulations in Europe. The *Interim Act relating to entry restrictions for foreign nationals out of concern for public health* has seen several changes during the pandemic. On January 23, 2020, the restrictions peaked when essentially all persons without permanent residency were either denied entry or asked to leave the country. The restrictions included persons with work contracts in Norway and foreign exchange students.

In Norway, the majority of persons who sell sex are migrants. Some have permanent residency or citizenship; others hold tourist visas, while others still are in Norway clandestinely. The extreme focus on border and immigration control as a significant tool of stopping the spread of coronavirus has had a devastating impact on the prostitution market itself and the lives of migrant sex workers in Norway. Therefore, we will start this chapter by summarising the Norwegian handling of disease control concerning immigration and then discussing how this affected persons who sell sex more specifically.

Contagion invasion

The concept of imported contagion (importsmitte) has been central to Norwegian authorities' disease control. While nearly all countries have had restrictions on entry and travel during the pandemic, few have been as severe as Norway. Travel and entry restrictions eased in summer 2020; however, the second and particularly the third wave of infections in autumn 2020 and in winter 2021 saw very severe restrictions.

Travelling to and from Norway will increase dramatically in the following weeks. Between the first and tenth of January, Wizz Air have 84 arrivals from Poland to Norway. This means at least 15 000 airplane seats from Poland to Norway, and this is only from one airline company.

Raymond Johansen, governing mayor of Oslo, press conference, 10.12.2020²

The travellers described by Johansen are mainly Polish labourers with employment in Norway or Polish persons with residency/citizenship in Norway. Poles are now the largest immigrant group in Norway, and the majority has come as labour migrants. Whilst in the quote above, Johansen likens their arrival as an invasion of “15 000 airplane seats”, i.e. 15 000 Poles. To describe a group that is part of Norwegian

² <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/koronavirus/status-om-handteringen-av-korona/10-desember-byradet-forlenger-den-sosiale-nedstengingen-til-7-januar>

society and an essential part of the labour force with this type of invasion language is perplexing.

There have been reports of harassment of persons of immigrant background, but stigmatising remarks have also come from politicians. In an op-ed, Populist Progress Party then-leader Siv Jensen and spokesperson on immigration issues, Jon Helgheim, claimed that, although reasons are complex, the over-representation of infections among immigrant populations is likely due to less compliance with guidelines. This was denied by Prime Minister Erna Solberg, and pointed to that there was no foundation for Helgheim and Jensen's belief and urged Norwegians to stop harassing persons of immigrant background. What Solberg did not address, however, is how public use of invasion metaphors and concepts such as imported contagion may have fuelled anti-immigrant sentiments in the majority population.

Although it is understandable that countries wish to restrict travel to halt the spread of infection, it is questionable if the type of invasion metaphors used by officials and in the media in Norway help create solidarity and trust between nationals and the immigrant population. The pandemic may not have created more racism and xenophobia in Norway, but the rhetoric used undoubtedly lends credence to the pre-existing idea of outsiders as a threat.

Dugnad: disease control through individualisation of structural problems?

“Dugnad” is a central concept in Norwegian public discourse. Originating from Old Norse, dugnad implies any form of unpaid labour that one does for a community, organisation or group.³ Dugnad includes various activities, from traditional voluntary work for charities to parents organising bake sales at their children's school. Dugnad can also include donating to charities; the annual televised *TV-aksjonen* where money is raised for various charities, is referred to as “national dugnad” (nasjonal dugnad).⁴

During a press conference on March 11, Prime Minister Erna Solberg called for “all residents to partake in a dugnad to stop the spread of infection”.⁵ Dugnad, and particularly “national dugnad” (nasjonal dugnad,) has since continued to be used as a catch-all concept for the Norwegian efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus by the media and the government alike. However, though self-explanatory for someone born

³ <https://snl.no/dugnad>

⁴ <https://www.nrk.no/etikk/tv-aksjon-i-nrk-siden-1974-1.6500507>

⁵ Author's translation from Norwegian. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/pressekonferanse-om-nye-tiltak-for-a-bekjempe-koronaviruset/id2693286/>

and raised in Norway, it is questionable how well the concept is understood among immigrant populations.

Framing the efforts as *dugnad* places the responsibility for the community on the individual. Thus, following the guidelines for minimising the spread of the virus is an individual responsibility for the greater good of the community. However, following guidelines may be difficult, or even impossible, for some populations. For example, working from home, avoiding public transport and socialising with elderly family members has been particularly challenging for some migrant populations, where many have jobs within the service sectors (and are thus unable to work from home), are dependent on public transport, live in extended families and more crowded conditions. Not surprisingly, the infection rate and hospitalisations have been substantially higher within immigrant populations.⁶

Contagion bombs and a threat to public health: Immigration authorities and persons who sell sex

Right before Christmas, on December 21, 2020, several Norwegian news outlets reported on statements from the Oslo Police made by police prosecutor Andreas Meeg-Bentzen. Meeg-Bentzen expressed concern over that Eastern-European sex workers break quarantine rules when travelling to Norway. He then went on by stating that the Oslo police have uncovered more incidents of prostitution than usual, and that several of the women (no male sex sellers are mentioned) have been fined and that the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration expelled or denied entry for several of them: "We are concerned for public health. This represents potential contagion bombs that will increase infection in society."⁷ Interestingly, Meeg-Bentzen admits that there are no known cases of infection among sex workers but that contact tracing may prove difficult. The Oslo police hence base this concern on a "hunch" rather than anything founded in experience. According to the Police and Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, the basis for the practice was *Interim Act relating to entry restrictions for foreign nationals out of concern for public health*.⁸

After Christmas and the New Year, expulsions and denial of entries for foreign women and transwomen⁹ who sell sex intensified. News outlets reported on several incidents of expulsions and denials of entry of women who sell sex. On January 8, public service

⁶ Indseth T, Godøy A, Kjøllesdal M, Arnesen T, Carelo, CJ, Vinjerui KH, Elgersma IH, Telle K. Covid 19 etter fødeland fra mars 2020 til februar 2021. [Covid-19 by country March 2020-February 2021], Rapport 2021. Oslo: Folkehelseinstituttet, 2021.

⁷ <https://www.tv2.no/a/11846475/>

⁸ <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2020-06-19-83>

⁹ Pro Sentret is not aware of any men who sell sex who have been expelled or denied entry.

broadcaster NRK reported on a press release by the Oslo Police about a sex worker who had been expelled from Norway in December 2020. Oslo Police prosecutor Andreas Meeg-Bentzen again acted as a spokesperson: “The lady has not done anything illegal in itself. She is expelled because she sells sex and the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration considers her a threat to public health.”¹⁰ According to the article, the woman in question had documented that she had followed the rules on quarantine upon entry to Norway in early December. However, the Oslo Police claimed that she had had more than 20 close contacts during this period when, at the time, authorities recommended having no more than ten. What the police bases this assumption on is not stated. In the days that followed, media outlets reported on several other incidents¹¹ where women who sell sex were denied entry or expelled. In all cases, the denials of entry or expulsions were due to a suspicion that they had not withheld quarantine upon entry and/or had more close contacts (clients) than recommended by authorities.

The prostitution market in Norway is relatively small. A FAFO report¹² from 2008 estimated that around 3000 individuals sold sex in a year in total. In Pro Sentret’s experience, there is no indication of a growth in the market since then, but there has been a definite decline during the pandemic. To Pro Sentret’s knowledge, there have been no outbreaks of Covid-19 related to the prostitution market, and previous experience tells us that persons who sell sex are generally very conscientious with protecting themselves against infection. To, like Meeg-Bentzen, view prostitution as a major disease vector in society is therefore poorly supported at best and speculative at worst. The largest part of the prostitution market, i.e. persons who *buy* sex, has not received any police attention. According to the latest (2002) Norwegian National Sex Survey, 13.1 % of men (0.3 % of women) had paid for sex in their lifetime¹³, yet the police activity seems to have been solely focussed on the sellers.

Pinpointing any marginalised population as a potential contagion bomb is deeply derogatory and counterproductive in establishing trust (and therefore cooperation) between this population and authorities. Pro Sentret has seen the consequences of this first hand: service users are cautious contacting authorities, even to report serious and violent crime, due to the well-founded fear of expulsion from Norway.

¹⁰ <https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/sexarbeider-utvist--en-trussel-mot-folkehelsen-1.15319298>

¹¹ <https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/fire-sexarbeidere-bortvises-fra-norge--alle-har-brutt-smittevernloven-1.15323821>, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/oAkq9B/sexarbeider-bortvises-fra-landet-broet-karantene-og-hadde-30-kunder-i-uka>

¹² Tveit, Marianne & Skilbrei, May-Len, 2008. Mangfoldig marked: Prostitusjonens omfang, innhold og organisering. Oslo: Fafø

¹³ Træen, Bente et al. Rapport fra seksualvaneundersøkelsene i 1987, 1992, 1997 og 2002. Folkehelseinstituttet.

Furthermore, from a public health perspective, the fear of expulsion hinders persons who sell sex from testing for coronavirus.

Further, trust was low even before the pandemic, but Pro Sentret fears that the pejorative language and targeting by the Police may have caused irreparable damage between the group and authorities in future. This may also have consequences for the Police's ability to uncover cases of human trafficking: Norwegian service provider for victims of human trafficking, ROSA¹⁴, wrote in their annual report how previous experience has shown how the Police's eagerness to expel persons who are in Norway illegally, has been at the expense of their duty to identify victims.¹⁵

Further restrictions on travel and entry

New restrictions on travel and entry came into force due to the rise in infections by the so-called Alpha variant. As a result, on January 29, 2021, borders essentially closed for all non-residents, including for those with Norwegian work contracts, persons with family members in Norway and students.¹⁶ Due to the new restrictions, all persons without permanent residency in Norway, including persons who sell sex, were in effect made illegal migrants overnight.

On May 26, 2021, the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) monitors compliance with European Economic Area rules in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, sent a letter of formal notice concerning Norwegian restrictions upon entry on the basis of COVID-19.¹⁷ In the letter, ESA reached the conclusion that with the current travel restrictions, Norway had failed to fulfil its obligations to EEA law on freedom of movement.

Reactions from Pro Sentret and other service providers

On January 28, public broadcaster NRK reported that at least 53 persons who sell sex had been denied entry or expelled from Norway during the pandemic, and at least 15 of those had been sent to National Police Immigration Detention Centre awaiting transport.¹⁸ All had been denied entry or expelled out of concern to public health.¹⁹

The expulsions and denials of entry of persons who sell sex lead to fear and worry among Pro Sentret's service users. For Pro Sentret's employees, giving guidance and

¹⁴ <http://rosa-help.no/publikasjoner-om-menneskehandel/>

¹⁵ Årsrapport 2020. ROSA:2020

¹⁶ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/innforer-de-strengeste-innreisereglene-til-norge-siden-mars-2020/id2830390/>

¹⁷ <https://www.eftasurv.int/newsroom/updates/covid-19-pandemic-esa-asks-norway-align-entry-restrictions-eea-rules:nb>

¹⁸ <https://www.nrk.no/norge/xl/sendt-ut-for-sexsalg-1.15349773>

¹⁹ Ibid.

advice was highly challenging, especially since the Police and the Directorate of Immigration gave vague reasons for expulsions (such as assuming that recommendations on the number of contacts had not been followed). Director of Pro Sentret, Bjørg Norli, therefore sent letters to the National Police Directorate, Ministry of Justice and Public Security and Oslo Police District regarding the practice of denials of entry and expulsions of persons who sell sex. In the letters, Norli called for clearing up several inconsistencies and problematic aspects of the practice, of which some will be discussed below.

One of the inconsistencies Norli pointed to was whether selling sex is regarded as an enterprise or a private relation. When selling sex was temporarily prohibited in the first few months of the pandemic in 2020, the Health Directorate had clarified that selling sexual services fell into one-to-one type services (hairdressers, massage therapists, tattoo artists etc.) that were prohibited during this time.²⁰ For the women who were expelled or denied entry in late 2020 and early 2021, having more than ten close contacts was given as proof that they had not withheld rules related to minimising the spread of coronavirus. However, the limitations²¹ (that were local to Oslo municipality) on the number of contacts applied only to private gatherings, not to enterprises (who were allowed to remain open).

Further, Norli posed the question of whether the *Interim Act relating to entry restrictions for foreign nationals out of concern for public health*, the Act Relating to Control of Communicable Diseases, and the *Immigration act* (separately or in conjunction with one another) gave the Police unlimited methods such as seizing mobile phones without consent; house searches; reviewing personal finances; undercover police work (posing as clients) etc.

Norli also asked if the dehumanising language, such as “contagion bombs” and calling persons who sell sex a threat to public health, used by Oslo Police prosecutor Andreas Meeg-Bentzen, was in line with the Oslo Police’s ethical guidelines (verdigrunnlag).

Pro Sentret did receive an answer from Oslo Police District, where they denied any mishandling of the expulsions and denials of entry for persons who sell sex, although they did admit that investigating whether a person is a victim of human trafficking

²⁰ Pro Sentret, 2020. The exclusion of persons who sell sexual services in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Experiences from the field in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark. Pro Sentret/Velferdsetaten

²¹ <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/english/coronavirus/status-reports-on-coronavirus-measures/26-october-oslo-city-government-is-asking-everyone-to-limit-social-contact-to-a-minimum>

posed a challenge. The Ministry of Justice and Public Security did, however, respond and act on the letter sent, as we shall see in the next section.

Aftermath: the development of a guide for persons who sell sex

On January 15. 2021, Pro Sentret, together with Nadheim²², was called to a meeting with Minister of Justice and Public Defence Monica Mæland to discuss the situation on COVID-19 and persons who sell sex. The meeting resulted in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security contacting health authorities discuss the situation further. Shortly after, the Institute of Public Health contacted Pro Sentret. The Ministry of Health and Care Services had given the Institute of Public Health, the Directorate of Health, Pro Sentret and Nadheim the task of developing a guide for preventing COVID-19 when selling sex. A working group was set up, consisting of representatives from health authorities, Pro Sentret and other service providers²³ and the deadline was short: the guide was to be completed in less than a month. The guide was then sent to the Directorate of Health for quality control and translation to English, Thai, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, Bulgarian and Russian. The guide was published on Pro Sentret's and other service providers' webpages and social media on April 20, 2021, and it received media coverage²⁴ by public service broadcaster NRK.

Although a small victory, the fact that authorities saw the need for developing a guide for persons who sell sex, is an indication that the year-long plea from Pro Sentret and other service providers to not exclude this group in the effort to halt the spread of coronavirus had effect. Although some of Pro Sentret's requests to authorities, such as providing financial aid for persons who sell sex, have failed to materialise, developing the guide recognises that persons who sell sex are concerned with preventing infection, both for themselves and for their clients.

Testing and vaccination of persons without residency

Vaccinating the population is a crucial tool for re-opening societies and a return to normalcy. Before herd immunity is reached via vaccinations, testing, isolation and quarantine, in conjunction with travel restrictions, are the main tools in the Norwegian strategy.

²² A service provider in Oslo for persons who sell sex.

²³ Nadheim Oslo, Nadheim Trondheim, Albertine, Fri and Pion.

²⁴ <https://www.nrk.no/norge/na-far-sexarbeidere-egne-smittevernrad-1.15457340?fbclid=IwAR1a0O4tWID52-XYYPVvAtZu2Rd8PghDod-ZoInGrKNmCIZyfiCRCe17FfM>

Foreign nationals have been meet with severe restrictions during the pandemic in Norway. However, health authorities and municipalities have collaborated in several regions to be able to provide vaccines for non-residents, as is mandated by the Norwegian Act Relating to Control of Communicable Diseases²⁵.

In Oslo Municipality, the Agency for Health has collaborated closely with health authorities, primarily the Institute of Public Health and the Directorate of Health, as well as with charities such as the Salvation Army and the City Church mission in order to draw up a vaccination and testing strategy for foreign nationals. A test centre was set up and a facility for foreign nationals in quarantine, both services free of charge.

Vaccination of the population was delayed when the AstraZeneca vaccines were taken out of the Norwegian vaccination programme. In April and May 2021, the vaccination rate took off and foreign nationals who belonged to a prioritised group (because of age or underlying medical conditions), receive a referral for vaccination via the Health Centre for Undocumented Migrants.

From May, Pro Sentret's medical doctor were able to give referrals for vaccination of service users. During spring, the Agency for Health concluded that vaccines were to be offered to especially vulnerable groups, such as illicit drug users, homeless persons and persons who are dependent on income from selling sex. Foreign nationals who sell sex could therefore be vaccinated via Pro Sentret's medical clinic in collaboration with Gamle Oslo municipal district.

²⁵ https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1994-08-05-55#KAPITTEL_1

Experiences from service providers

Norway

Pro Sentret

Pro Sentret²⁶ is Oslo Municipality's health- and social service for persons who sell/have sold sex, as well as a national centre of expertise on prostitution-related issues. Pro Sentret has remained open in the period with some adaptations, such as limiting the number of visitors, encouraging service users to make appointments rather than drop-in during opening hours, mandatory mask wearing for employees and service users, and a stricter hygiene regimen. Serving of warm food was halted during periods of surges in infections and emergency food packages have been distributed among service users in need. Outreach in street prostitution and online has continued as normal throughout the period.

Street prostitution in Oslo has been nearly at a standstill during the period, especially since the New Year, with Pro Sentret's social workers meeting anywhere from nil to ten persons during weekly outreach sessions. Although a small section of the prostitution market even before the pandemic, restrictions and prohibitions on traveling to Norway and the strict lockdown in Oslo has rendered street prostitution almost non-existent.

The number of advertisements in major escort sites went down dramatically during the first lockdown in 2020. After travel restrictions eased in July 2020, there was a surge in advertisements. By September, the number stabilised, but from November, advertisements went down again, likely due to increased travel restrictions and a second lockdown in Oslo. Numbers continued to go down during winter and spring 2021 and are still at a low level during the writing of this report. It is worth noting that advertisements in escort sites for men who sell sex to men have remained relatively stable throughout the period.

Alarmingly, the number of registered consultations on violence (physical and sexual) at Pro Sentret nearly doubled in 2020. The reason for this upsurge is complex however. Although some of these consultations may be causally linked to the pandemic, most of them have been about past (pre-pandemic) experiences of violence. Employees' report that the pandemic, with the isolation, reduced services and fear it has entailed, have re-triggered past trauma in service users. Thus, the need for

²⁶ <https://prosentret.no/en/>

support and counselling on experiences of violence has increased, but the number of experiences of violence perpetrated in 2020 did not necessarily go up. A worrying tendency is that several service users have re-kindled relationships with former partners, relationships that have included various forms of violence. Again, Pro Sentret's employees believe this to be an effect of increased loneliness and isolation among service users, where bad relationships are seen as "better than none". In some cases, a desperate financial or housing situation can also lead to a re-kindling of such relationships.

The number of service users went down by a 130 persons in 2020; a direct consequence of Norway's strict travel restrictions. In winter 2021, further restrictions were implemented, making it virtually impossible for foreigners to enter Norway. Since January 2021, foreigners have (with very few exceptions) not been allowed to remain in Norway, even if they entered before the stricter restrictions were imposed. For Pro Sentret's service users, of whom most are foreign nationals, the consequences have been dire. For foreign service users who have remained in Norway, the risk of being expelled has been tangible (see p. 12 ff. for a full discussion) and several individuals have been expelled or denied entry, especially since Christmas and the New Year. The immigration police has used questionable methods during raids, and several service users have reported demeaning practices, such as being forced to dress in front of the police, confiscation of telephones and police officers posing as clients.

Nadheim

Nadheim Oslo is a centre in Oslo that provides counselling and social services for persons who sell sex and offers rapid testing for HIV and syphilis. Nadheim is a branch of the Church City Mission.

Employees have mainly worked from home during the period, and in-house services have been reduced. Nadheim did outreach in street prostitution one night per month from June to November 2020. When further restrictions were implemented in December 2020 however, they met very few individuals during outreach. Outreach was therefore paused in the New Year. Outreach online has however continued, as well as in in Thai massage parlours.

From Nadheim's work with Thai women (who primarily work from massage parlours), they report that the period has been turbulent. There have been several police raids, some of which has been highly publicised in the media. This has aggravated mistrust

and fear of the Police, resulting in a reluctance to report violent crimes. Harassment from clients has increased. For some Thai who have citizenship in another EU-country, travel restrictions have made it difficult to leave Norway. Providing practical assistance to this group has been challenging, as they have poor language skills, poor knowledge of the Norwegian welfare system and no network in Norway. Among Thai-Norwegians who have been furloughed from regular jobs, some have started selling sex for the first time. In massage parlours, there has been shifts in ownership, bankruptcy and high turnover of employees.

From their other outreach work, Nadheim reports that many sex sellers are afraid to be expelled or rejected entry due to the high level of activity of immigration police. Some service users state that they constantly take advertisements down from websites in order to avoid the police's attention. Nadheim is very concerned with that persons who are victims of human trafficking have been expelled or rejected entry. Some service users have avoided working in Oslo due to the police activity being especially high here.

Some foreign service users have needed help with accessing health services, since they are stranded in Norway with no rights to medical care. Other foreign service users have needed help with understanding national and local regulations, travel restrictions, quarantine regulations and testing. Testing in order to travel has been especially challenging, as testing centres have not accepted cash payment.

Nadheim Trondheim²⁷ is a centre in Trondheim that provides counselling and social services for persons who sell sex and offers rapid testing for HIV and syphilis. Nadheim Trondheim is a branch of the Church City Mission.

Nadheim Trondheim reports that service users have contacted them regarding entry and travelling to Norway and assistance with testing in order to travel. They are aware of one incident in Trondheim where two women were denied entry for not withholding quarantine, as they had started selling sex before quarantine was over.

Sykepleie på hjul (Nurses on wheels)

Sykepleie på hjul²⁸ is an outreach service for persons with illicit drug addiction based in Oslo, run by Fransiskushjelpen. Although not specifically a service provider for persons who sell sex, the organisation are in contact with the street prostitution

²⁷ <https://kirkensbymisjon.no/nadheim-trondheim/>

²⁸ <https://www.fransiskushjelpen.no/rusomsorg>

milieu through their outreach work. They have had the mandate to test for Covid-19 among illicit drug users.

Sykepleie på hjul has continued work as normal, with some adaptations, in the period. During summer and the beginning of autumn, they encountered a few persons selling sex in the streets, but as new restrictions came into force in autumn, street prostitution came to a virtual standstill. They encountered a few individuals in winter, but only during evenings.

Albertine

Albertine²⁹ is a service provider for persons who sell, or have sold, sex, based in Stavanger. Albertine is a branch of the Church City Mission.

In outreach online and on the streets, Albertine has seen a decrease of persons who sell sex. Albertine reports that they have had fewer, but more complicated requests from service users. Service users have needed assistance with contacting welfare services, health issues, finding a place to live, disease control, entry- and travel restrictions, personal finances and debt.

Several service users have had trouble making ends meet due to a drop in demand for sexual services, and have needed assistance in applying for financial aid, especially among persons working in Thai massage parlours or in street prostitution. Others have asked for information on Albertine's work-training project, as they wish to quit selling sex.

The travel restrictions has had a severe impact on foreign service users. Some report worry over finances and for providing for family back home. The restrictions hindered persons who wish to travel to Norway to sell sex, but also from visiting family, or returning home for persons who were already in the country. Albertine reports that mental health among foreign service users has been negatively affected due to the restrictions.

Albertine have experienced dialogue with municipal services and authorities as good, but that the information flow has been less than optimal. There has also been a lack of translated information, which has prevented foreign service users from accessing information.

²⁹ <https://kirkensbymisjon.no/albertine-english/>

Fri

Fri³⁰ is a service provider for persons who sell, or have sold, sex, and for victims of human trafficking based in Bergen. Fri is a branch of the Church City Mission.

Fri has assisted service users via telephone and in office throughout the period. Throughout the period Fri has distributed PPE, shared updated and translated information on national and regional rules and regulations, vaccines and more among service users online, in outreach on the streets and via text messages.

Requests from service users have included EU-citizens who wish to register as job seekers, assistance with applying for financial aid and contacting welfare services, questions regarding disease control and testing, information on travel restrictions and assistance in relation to expulsions and denials of entry. Fri has seen a decrease in service users, something they believe to be related to travel restrictions.

Fri has seen changes in webpages that advertise sexual services in the period. The number of advertisements have gone down, and they have seen an increase in advertisers that offer riskier services such as unprotected sex. They also report that prices has gone down, and that they have been in contact with service users who feel pressured into accepting whatever clients they can get. They have also seen an increase in online services, such as webcam and sale of used underwear, and the use of OnlyFans and Snapchat.

Fri has done outreach in street prostitution throughout the period, and report that few has been active on that arena, with few to none after the Easter period. They have had a focus on preventing infection in this group, and have distributed sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, condoms and facemasks. The individuals encountered in street prostitution have been offered vaccines.

Few of Fri's service users have reported having trouble with the police during the period. However, several express fear over advertising services because of the risk of being caught, thus being expelled or denied entry.

Fri has been part of a working group consisting of several organisations and Bergen Municipality. They have had a positive experience of collaborating with the municipality, especially in offering vaccines to their target group.

³⁰ <https://kirkensbymisjon.no/fri-tiltak-for-ofre-for-menneskehandel/>

Pion

Pion³¹ is a rights organisation for persons who sell or have sold sex. They do outreach among persons with Thai origin and among LGBTQI+ persons who sell sex. They also offer legal counselling.

Although everything indicates that the prostitution market has been reduced during the pandemic, Pion has seen an increase in service users asking for assistance and guidance. Concerns regarding travel and entry to Norway, how to register as a business owner, police activity, expulsions and denials of entry has been the most common.

From their outreach work with persons with Thai origin, Pion reports of turbulent times, with few clients and a difficult financial situation. Several massage parlours (that also offer sexual services) have been forced to close. Many in this group have family in Thailand who are dependent on their remittances. In general, the group has a poor understanding of the Norwegian welfare system, and have difficulty accessing aid and support to which they are entitled. Pion also reports of groups of Eastern Europe men who target Thai massage parlours for robberies and theft. Pion's Thai field worker has successfully collaborated with Pro Sentret's health department on vaccination of the group.

Pion has been active in public debate throughout the period, calling for financial aid for sex workers³² and condemning expulsions and denials of entry³³ of sex workers.

Sweden

Sweden's strategy to combat the spread of coronavirus has primarily been based on voluntary measures and recommendations rather than prohibitions and rule of law. As infection rates increased during autumn, more restrictions, such as limiting the number of visitors in public spaces, have been introduced. COVID-19-related deaths and excess mortality have been substantially higher in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries. However, excess mortality is lower than most other countries in

³¹ <http://www.pion-norge.no/>

³² <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/pandemiens-verdig-og-uverdige-ndhjelpmottakere/>, <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/hvem-har-ansvar-for-smittevern-mot-covid-19/>, <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/pinlig-taushet-fra-helsemyndighetene/>,

³³ <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/smittebomber-serist/>, <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/bortvist-pa-grunn-av-brudd-pa-anbefalinger/>, <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/arrests-and-deportations-of-sex-workers-in-norway/>, <http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/er-politiets-arbeidsmetoder-i-prostitusjonsmiljene-ulovlige/>

continental Europe in 2020.³⁴ Non-residents, including undocumented migrants, are included in the national vaccination programme.

Sweden has had a general entry ban for non-EU citizen since March 2020. Borders remained open for EU-citizens, and some non-EU countries throughout the summer and autumn.³⁵ In December, due to the spread of the British variant of SARS-CoV-2, entry from the UK and Denmark was banned with some exceptions. In late January 2021, entry from Norway was banned for the same reason.³⁶

Since February 2021, foreign nationals are required to present a negative test result upon entry. Non-EU nationals are still banned from entering (with some exceptions), but the entry ban from Norway, Denmark and the UK was lifted in March 2021.³⁷

Selling sexual services is legal in Sweden, but buying is not.³⁸ Profiting from, or accommodating another person's prostitution is criminalised. Renting out premises for prostitution-related activities and advertising sexual services is also criminalised.³⁹

Municipal service providers

Pro Sentret sent the survey to the municipal service providers for persons who sell sexual services. Three municipal service providers give specialised services to persons who sell sexual services in Sweden: Mika-mottagningen in Gothenburg, Mika-mottagningen in Stockholm and Evonhuset in Malmo. Mika-mottagningen in Gothenburg and Evonhuset have answered the survey.

Mika-mottagningen in Gothenburg⁴⁰ is a centre that provides social services for persons who have experience of sexual services or other parts of the sex industry or self-harm through sex. They also do outreach in street prostitution and on the internet.

They were able to work normally with some restrictions up onto December 2020, with in-house meetings with service users etc. Since December, when further restrictions implemented in Sweden due to an increase in infections, the centre has been closed for in-house meetings. However, from February 2021 some service users

³⁴ <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2021/overdodlighet-i-europa-under-2020/>

³⁵ <https://regeringen.se/>

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ <https://regeringen.se/>

³⁸ https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/brottsbalk-1962700_sfs-1962-700

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ <https://goteborg.se/wps/portal/start/social--och-familjefragor/familj-barn-och-ungdom/mikamottagningen>

have been allowed to have in-house meetings. For new service users, Mika-mottagningen have offered to meet in their home.

Much of other welfare services (such as psychiatric outpatient clinics and social welfare offices) has been closed for in-house meetings, something that has affected the quality of services in general. Further, feelings of isolation and loneliness has affected the mental health of the service users negatively, and some have lost their jobs. For service users who have begun to study, remote teaching has been a challenge, leading to isolation.

Mika-mottagningen has seen an increase in service users who are active on OnlyFans, as well as an increase of previous service users who have contacted them due to a worsening of mental health.

Evonhuset⁴¹ is a centre in Malmo who provides services for persons who sell and buy sexual services, self-harm through sex or who are victims of human trafficking for sexual purposes.

Evonhuset's employees have been working remotely from home to a high degree, something that has limited the possibility to offer in-house meetings. Service users have been offered meetings via telephone- or video calls. In outreach online and in street prostitution, Evonhuset offers support and help on how to be tested for COVID-19.

Through the police and social services, Evonhuset has received information that persons, both in Sweden and abroad, have started to sell sex to support themselves due to unemployment. Further, Evonhuset is also concerned that isolation, loneliness and a lack of social interaction may have led to an increase in destructive behavioural patterns, such as a problematic consumption of pornography.

Other service providers

Noomi⁴² is a branch of *Hela människan*, a charity for social and diaconal work. Their main principal is the Church of Sweden, along with 11 other churches. They are located in Malmo and offer services for women exploited in human trafficking and prostitution, including a safe house, outreach and legal counselling. In addition, they

⁴¹ <https://malmo.se/Bo-och-leva/Stod-och-omsorg/Brott-hot-och-vald/Evonhuset---for-dig-som-saljer-koper-konsumerar-eller-skadar-dig-med-sex-eller-ar-utsatt-for-manniskohandel.html>

⁴² <http://www.noomimalmo.se/>

run the project *Thai Wise* that provides support for Thai women in the massage industry. The majority of Noomi's service users are migrants.

Noomi has continued activities during the pandemic, including outreach online and in Thai massage parlours. During outreach in parlours, Noomi has distributed condoms, lubricants, hand sanitisers etc, and given out information from the Public Health Agency. Noomi reports that information from authorities has been insufficient, both in regard to availability in different languages (especially Thai) and in relation to persons who sell sex. Information Noomi has tried to "fill the gap" in information from authorities for their service users, particularly through the project "Thai Wise". Information from the Public Health Authority on Covid-19 has been available in Thai however, and Noomi has distributed this information among their Thai service users.

They have also assisted service users in buying tickets home, pointing to the difficulty of buying tickets with cash and poor knowledge on restrictions among service users.

Employees have not been prioritised for vaccine, despite having been exposed to infection during outreach. Vulnerable groups (which includes Noomi's service users) will be vaccinated by an NGO in the region.

At the beginning of the pandemic, advertisements decreased. As borders opened up and lockdowns were lifted in other countries, advertisements increased again. Sweden has not had a lockdown, and borders have remained open, making it possible to come and work (with selling sex).

Noomi has met several women who lost their jobs in other European countries, who started selling sex for the first time in Sweden. They have seen an increase of Latin-American women, especially Dominican with residency in Spain, and a decrease in African (Nigerian) women. Noomi believes this is due to difficulty getting into Europe (closed borders) during the pandemic.

Some service users have had a decrease in revenue, leading them to take on clients they otherwise would not. In general, there has been more reports of violence and disrespectful clients, including; clients who take off condoms, refuse to use lube, paying with counterfeit money, refuse to pay. Noomi reports that the violence has been more systematic, including organised robberies targeting sex sellers.

Unfortunately, the relationship between the women and the police has deteriorated during the pandemic. Much effort has been made to act as a "bridge" between the

women who sell sex and the police. There has been an increase in police activity, especially from December 2020 and onwards, in the prostitution market. Noomi is particularly concerned with poor treatment and information by the border police. Further, the border police have rejected entry for women by referring to an older legal paragraph unlawful living (otillbörligt leverne), or that they do not have enough financial means to stay in Sweden (set to 450 SEK per day by authorities⁴³). Collaboration with the human trafficking group works well however, and employees from Noomi or Evonhuset are present during their raids.

When asked what lasting effect the pandemic will have on the prostitution market, Noomi raises the concern for persons who have begun selling sex for the first time, pointing to the difficulty leaving prostitution after having gotten used to the relatively high earnings from selling sex.

Ellencentret⁴⁴ is a centre that is a branch of the foundation *1000 möjligheter*⁴⁵, located in Stockholm. They offer psychological counselling and treatment (with a licensed psychologist) via chat or in-house for persons between 15-25, who have sold sex, self-harm through sex or have been involved in so called “sugar dating”. They also provide legal counselling for said groups.

Ellencentret has continued to offer counselling both via chat and in in-house meetings. Support group sessions have been cancelled. They have experienced an increase in cancelled appointments in-house, and more consultations have taken place via telephone and video calls than before the pandemic.

The pandemic has affected the target group negatively. Persons who previously held jobs in the service sector have been laid off, and were forced to start selling sex again, or to a higher degree than before. For many service users, isolation and anxiety have led to a worsening of mental wellbeing, which for some has triggered self-harming sexual behaviour.

Ellencentret has seen a tendency towards more online activities, such as selling videos and photos via, for example, OnlyFans. Young people have been disadvantaged in the job market during the pandemic and for some of the service users, selling sex would not likely had been an option if other opportunities had been present.

⁴³ <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Privatpersoner/Besoka-Sverige/Om-du-inte-behover-visum-for-att-resa-till-Sverige.html>

⁴⁴ <https://ellencentret.se/>

⁴⁵ 1000 möjligheter works with combatting boys and young men's violence against girls and young women. <https://1000mojligheter.se/>

Many of the service users have described how clients have become more violent, stating that it may be because those who continue to buy sex during a pandemic may be less likely to be concerned with risk.

Member- and network organisations

Inte din hora⁴⁶ is a network organisation for and by persons with experience of commercial sexual exploitation and selling/trading sexual services.

They have not seen a decrease in the demand for sexual services, however, they have noted that some seem to have lowered their prices and that more people may have turned to selling sex.

They are concerned with services closing down, making it more difficult to leave the sex industry. They are also concerned that a lasting economic downturn may add to this difficulty. Inte din hora notes that police activity towards the prostitution market has increased, and though they have not been affected by this directly, they raise the concern that persons without residency may be expelled from Sweden as a result.

Red Umbrella Sweden⁴⁷ is a member organisation by and for persons currently or previously working in the sex industry.

As a peer-run organisation with no paid employees, Red Umbrella Sweden has found it difficult to organise since members have been stressed and have had little time to set aside for the organisation.

Some members have reported having fewer or no clients at all and that the clients who are still there are harder or impossible to screen. Clients are cancelling or not showing up in larger numbers than before the pandemic. Members describe the situation as uncertain and scary. Some have not seen a difference in the number of clients, or just a small decrease.

Red Umbrella Sweden reports that they have seen many sex workers travelling to Sweden to work since lockdown has not been as severe. Many of these sex workers have never worked in Sweden before, with some being new to the industry. Some members report polarisation of prices, with more people charging lower rates than the average.

⁴⁶ <http://intedinhora.se/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.redumbrella.se/>

Many members have turned to online work (for example camming or OnlyFans) to supplement their income, but most have also continued doing in-person sex work.

Members report that the police activity targeting sex workers and their clients has increased. The police have more resources to focus on sex work because the pandemic has made other police work less needed. They have used these resources for doing almost weekly raids around Sweden and also to educate local police teams on how to do raids. This increase is also confirmed by the police themselves and by the media. Migrants are targeted the most, with single women traveling in from specific countries being profiled and having their bags searched and being followed by law enforcement.

Travel restrictions and the lack of travel restrictions have affected members. Members in bigger cities report that there are fewer clients from abroad. Sex workers who live in Sweden but travel abroad to work have no longer been able to do so.

Local recommendations about avoiding travelling and using public transport have led to less business travel and less commuting as people work from home, something that has resulted in a decreased demand for sexual services. This has primarily affected members living in small towns who have had a significant drop in customers.

We have had reports from members of landlords and airbnb hosts throwing out sex workers and then keeping the money and threatening them with police if they complain. It seems that with less people traveling the few that do draw more attention to themselves. Especially women travelling alone or together with other women.

Denmark

After the initial lockdown, Denmark allowed non-essential shops and services to open and primary school students returned to school in May 2020. In late May, rules on gatherings and entry into Denmark were relaxed. Further relaxations of entry regulations were made in mid-June.⁴⁸ As infections increased in autumn, new restrictions were implemented in September and October 2020, including limitations on gatherings, restaurants, bars and shops.⁴⁹ In November, when infections continued

⁴⁸ <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

to soar, further restrictions were put in place.⁵⁰ Stricter travel restrictions were implemented November 19, and foreigners now needed to present a “worthy purpose” (anerkendelsesværdigt formål) to be allowed entry to Denmark.⁵¹

In December 2020, Denmark entered a second lockdown, where shopping malls, department stores and one-to-one services (hairdressers, massage parlours, driving schools etc) closed. From December 25th, all non-essential shops closed. Further restrictions on gatherings and travel were put in place in January 2021, due to an increase in infections of the so-called “British variant” (B.1.1.7) of coronavirus.⁵²

In March 2021, The Danish government launched a re-opening plan in five stages, starting with reopening of educational services on April 6, through to May 21 by which virtually all shops, department stores, restaurants, services and activities had resumed activity. In order to use services (e.g. hairdressers, massage therapy etc.), participate in activities (e.g. religious gatherings, organised sports, use fitness centres etc.), cultural events and visit restaurants and bars, everyone are required to show a so called corona passport (Coronapas), to prove either that you have undergone infection, are vaccinated or have tested negative in the last 72 hours.⁵³ The passport is mainly digital (in the form of a smartphone app).⁵⁴

All are to be included in the vaccination programme, including non-residents, and practical implementation thereof is to be organised by regions/municipalities.

Reden

Reden, who provides services for women in prostitution, are run by the Danish branch of YWCA/YMCA⁵⁵. They are in turn divided into several different branches into many different regions. Reden Copenhagen (works with female illicit drug users who sell sex), Reden Aalborg (works with both Danish and migrant women who sell sex), Reden International (whose target group is female migrants who sell sex) and Reden women’s shelter (located in Copenhagen) for victims of human trafficking answered the survey via a group conference call.

⁵⁰ <https://sum.dk/>

⁵¹ <https://um.dk/da/rejse-og-ophold/rejse-til-udlandet/nyheder/newsdisplaypage/?newsID=75684BE1-0C71-46C1-B0D0-11F45A181CBB>

⁵² <https://sum.dk/>, <https://coronasmitte.dk/nyt-fra-myndighederne/pressemoeder/skaerpelse-af-rejsevejledninger-og-indreiserestriktioner>

⁵³ <https://en.coronasmitte.dk/corona-passport>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ <https://kfuksa.dk/om-organisationen/institutioner-tilbud>

The different branches of Reden have received funding for increased outreach services through state funded aid packages, particularly among illicit drug users.

Selling sex has been periodically prohibited (together with other one-to one services) on a national level. Persons who continued to sell sex have either received, or been threatened to receive, a fine of 10 000 DK. Oddly enough, outcall (when the sex seller comes to the buyer) has remained legal, while incall (when the buyer comes to the seller) has been prohibited in certain time periods. Reden has found information from authorities on the legality of selling sex inadequate, especially during the second lockdown, making giving information to service users challenging.

The general trend in recent years is that there are less Danish women in brothels and parlours. During the pandemic however, Reden has received information from the police that there are fewer foreign nationals involved in prostitution than normal because of travel restrictions. Reden has observed that some women from Bulgaria and Romania seem to have better networks for arranging (false) work contacts and have therefor been able to enter Denmark despite of the restrictions.

In regards to police activity in the prostitution market, sex sellers who are foreign nationals have primarily been targeted. Non-residents who lack an address in Denmark has been either rejected entry or expelled (thus prohibited from entering Denmark for two years).

There was a larger outbreak of coronavirus among illicit drug users in Vesterbro, Copenhagen in December 2020. Reden, together with other organisations who works with the target group, responded quickly and put pressure on authorities, something that has resulted in a very effective system for testing and contact tracing for the group.

Reden International⁵⁶ saw that many of their Nigerian service users who travelled to Italy (where they have residency) in the summer, were unable to return to Denmark due to travel restrictions in the autumn.

They saw a small increase in Latin-American women travelling to Denmark when travel restriction eased temporarily in January 2021. They also report meeting

⁵⁶ <https://kfuksa.dk/reden-international>

women who previously held jobs in the tourist industry in Spain who started selling sex after losing their jobs. These women had no previous experience of selling sex.

Fewer people have visited their café and those who do belong to the most vulnerable group. They have also seen an increase of LGBTQ+ persons visiting.

Reden's womens shelter for victims of human trafficking reports of a year tinged with the pandemic. Women are now staying in the shelter for longer than before, due to the travel restrictions. There has been fewer residents in the shelter since the borders were closed in December. They have developed an effective testing regime for their service users.

Reden Aalborg⁵⁷ reports of an increase in anxiety, loneliness, resignation and social and financial uncertainty among both Danish and foreign service users. For persons who are dependent on income from selling sex, the financial situation has been dire.

Reden Copenhagen⁵⁸ had to reduce the maximum capacity of their service centre to ten participants, and only for homeless women. This caused stress for both service users who were denied access, and among staff who were forced to turn users away. Fortunately, capacity is now back to normal. They have, due to extra funding, been able create a new outreach position "Reden on the streets" (Reden på gaden).

AmiAmi

AmiAmi⁵⁹ is an outreach and healthcare service for female migrants that sell sex and victims of human trafficking (including forced labour). They are located in Fredericia in south-eastern Jutland.

The period has been hectic for AmiAmi, with cases related to labour exploitation being time-consuming. Like Reden, AmiAmi expresses that rules and regulations regarding selling sex has been difficult to understand, especially during the second lockdown.

During the second lockdown in December, most EU-residents travelled home, and mainly third country nationals stayed on in Denmark. Thai massage parlours, who offer massage in addition to selling sex, remained open and AmiAmi has continued doing outreach there. For the parlours that are registered, it has been possible to apply for governmental aid due to reduced revenue and AmiAmi has assisted with this.

⁵⁷ <https://kfuksa.dk/reden-aalborg>

⁵⁸ <https://kfuksa.dk/reden-kobenhavn>

⁵⁹ <https://amiami.dk/>

They have also provided information on the guidelines for infection control, and they report that the parlours that have remained open are extremely preoccupied with following the guidelines. Parlour workers also test regularly for coronavirus, although a few parlours were fined for not checking clients' statuses.

Since entry into Denmark has required a "worthy purpose" (anerkendelsesværdigt formål), many of AmiAmi's service users have been turned away at the border. Some have been granted entry for visiting a friend, while others have entered Denmark during times when there was no border control present. AmiAmi have received many questions from service users abroad on when they can return and on current regulations.

Sexarbejdernes interesseorganisation (SIO)

Sexarbejdernes interesseorganisation⁶⁰ is a member organisation for and by persons who sell, or have sold, sex.

Since selling sex in brothels have been prohibited, more members are turning to selling sex from home, rented apartments or in clients' homes. For some, this has meant higher overhead costs than working in a brothel. Other have felt that working from home has been the only safe option to avoid the risk of being fined. This has led them to feel unsafe, as clients now know where they live. Some members have received offers from friends or clients to use their homes while they are at work. Several brothels have been forced to shut down permanently because of long periods of no revenue.

Brothels and sex sellers have been fined for working during lockdown, either 2500 DK for an individual sex seller, or 10 000 DK for a brothel. SIO reports that it is mainly in Jutland that fines have been given.

There has been no targeted state compensation for loss of income especially for sex sellers. However, sex sellers who have registered a sole proprietorship are not explicitly excluded from accessing state compensation. To SIO's knowledge, no one has been turned down for compensation due to the fact that they sell sex. However, SIO points to the fact that not all sex sellers have registered, or their income in the reference period has been too low to qualify. Some distrust authorities and chose to not apply for compensation for this reason.

⁶⁰ <https://www.s-i-o.dk/>

SIO were in discussions with the Danish health authority about developing safety guidelines for sex sellers during the pandemic, but this fell through.

Finland

As infection rates dropped, Finland started lifting restrictions June 1, 2020, allowing larger public gatherings, opening some public venues and an opening of restaurants and cafes.⁶¹ In July, entry from EU-countries with a similar infection rate to Finland was allowed, as well as from some non EU-countries.⁶² From August 1. Further restrictions were eased, such as the recommendation to work from home, and on public gatherings.⁶³ However, entry restrictions were reinforced for some countries in August⁶⁴, and as infection rates increased in autumn and winter, further restrictions were put in place. In late January 2021, entry restrictions and border control were heightened, only allowing some defined groups, such as close relatives and some work related travellers being allowed entry.⁶⁵

On March 1, 2021, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency due to a soar in infections, and restaurants and other establishments were forced to close.⁶⁶ The state of emergency was lifted on April 27.⁶⁷

Selling and buying sex is legal in Finland. However, buying sex from someone who is under 18, or a victim of human trafficking is not. Profiting from, or accommodating another person's prostitution is criminalised.⁶⁸ Renting out premises for prostitution-related activities and advertising for sexual services is also criminalised.⁶⁹

Pro-Tukipiste

Pro-Tukipiste⁷⁰ is a service provider (NGO) for persons that sell sex and erotic workers, with offices in Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. They offer social- and health services, do outreach, peer-work and provide other services such as training. The survey has been answered by the Helsinki office.

⁶¹ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/muutoksia-koronavirusepidemian-vuoksi-asetettuihin-rajoituksiin-1-kesakuuta>

⁶² <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/regeringen-drog-upp-riktlinjer-for-granskottroll-vid-de-inre-granserna-och-reserestriktioner->

⁶³ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/andrade-coronarestriktioner-fran-och-med-den-1-augusti>

⁶⁴ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/regeringen-skarpte-reserestriktionerna-vid-de-inre-och-yttre-granserna-pa-nytt->

⁶⁵ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/regeringen-beslutade-om-skarppningar-i-villkoren-for-granstrafiken>

⁶⁶ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/undantagsforhallanden-rader-i-finland>

⁶⁷ <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/befogenheter-enligt-beredskapslagen-ska-inte-langre-utovas-undantagsforhallandena-upphor-den-27-april>

⁶⁸ <https://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/ajantasa/1889/18890039001#L20>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ <https://protukipiste.fi/>

Pro-Tukipiste reports that the situation for their service users have differed greatly. For persons with a stable situation and regular, well-paying clients, have retained some level of income during the period. For foreign nationals and transient and isolated sex workers, however, the situation has been dire. Many have lost their income completely, and have been forced to borrow money to survive, putting them at risk of debt bondage.

Pro-Tukipiste has seen an increase in new service users (with no previous experience of sex work), as well as persons returning to sex work. There has been quite a lot of interest to start online business but it has not proved to be as easy of a solution that some has thought.

Reduced public low threshold services has meant reduced services for homeless and drug users, and access to services and support for mental health issues has been extremely poor.

Migrant and transient sex workers have not been able to travel and some of them have been stranded in Finland at the beginning of pandemic. COVID-19 tests and obligatory quarantine for the travellers has reduced the possibilities to travel because of not being able to work during quarantine (no income).

For service users who have registered as business owners, it has been possible to apply for financial aid due to loss of income. However, these service users usually do not wish to expose their business to authorities, meaning that though they are entitled to aid in theory, but in practise, they do not apply.

The way ahead

As shown, persons who sell sex have experienced great hardship during the pandemic in both Norway and the other Nordic countries. Service providers have also faced challenges in conducting their work due to the restrictions and regulations.

Despite of different legislation on prostitution, differences in the handling of the pandemic and infection rates, there are similarities in the situations for persons who sell sex.

Persons who have had their main income from selling sex have for the most part not been able to access financial aid. This has been either due to income from selling sex not being included in the financial aid packages or difficulty to navigating welfare systems.

Service providers have reported that many have had problems with accessing information. This is partly due to a lack of knowledge about welfare systems in general, but also because of a lack of information in different languages directed towards marginalised groups.

The police have increased their activity towards immigration control and the prostitution market. This targeting of people selling sex by the police has been detrimental in trust between the police and persons who sell sex. Several persons who sell sex have been expelled or denied entry, which have had devastating consequences for them and family depending on their income.

All service providers report a worsening in mental health among persons who sell sex. The decrease in demand in sexual services combined with police targeting people selling sex has led to dropped prices, and has pressured persons who sell sex to offer sexual services they formerly did not offer, like sex without a condom.

Marginalised people are affected by regulations and restrictions in a different way than the general population. As borders closed, some in the general population had to postpone their vacations abroad. For migrant selling sex it was impossible both to get home and to stay in the country. Also, small things like not being able to pay cash for goods and services affects people selling sex and migrants more severely than the general population.

The response from the government has been slow and the measures taken have not been sufficient in order to outweigh the negative consequences of the different measures placed by the government. Persons selling sex and service providers have not been included in decision-making and the needs of the group have not been sufficiently taken in to consideration when different measures have been put in place.

All Nordic countries have included non-residents, including those who sell sex, in vaccination programs. This is an example of positive measure taken by the governments.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not the last crisis that will hit us. We hope that the lessons learned from this pandemic will result in work that will make us better prepared to include marginalised and vulnerable groups in future pandemics.

We urge the Nordic governments take measures to include marginalised groups in the planning for crisis and emergencies. To map out the needs, and assure that the measures planned actually targets the group in an efficient and respectful way, people within marginalised groups should be included in this work, as well as service providers and organisations.

References

Indseth T, Godøy A, Kjøllesdal M, Arnesen T, Carelo, CJ, Vinjerui KH, Elgersma IH, Telle K. *Covid 19 etter fødeland fra mars 2020 til februar 2021. [Covid-19 by country March 2020-February 2021]*. Rapport 2021. Oslo: Folkehelseinstituttet, 2021.

Pro Sentret, 2020. *The exclusion of persons who sell sexual services in the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences from the field in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark*. Pro Sentret/Velferdsetaten: 2020.

Tveit, Marianne & Skilbrei, May-Len, 2008. *Mangfoldig marked: Prostitusjonens omfang, innhold og organisering*. Oslo: Fafo

Træen, Bente et al. *Rapport fra seksualvaneundersøkelsene i 1987, 1992, 1997 og 2002*. Folkehelseinstituttet: ??

ROSA. *Årsrapport 2020*. ROSA:2020

Media

https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/sexarbeider-utvist_-_en-trussel-mot-folkehelsen-1.15319298

[https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/fire-sexarbeidere-bortvises-fra-norge_-_alle-har-brutt-smittevernloven-1.15323821,](https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/fire-sexarbeidere-bortvises-fra-norge_-_alle-har-brutt-smittevernloven-1.15323821)

<https://www.nrk.no/norge/xl/sendt-ut-for-sexsalg-1.15349773>

<https://www.nrk.no/norge/na-far-sexarbeidere-egne-smittevernrad-1.15457340?fbclid=IwAR1a0O4tWID52-XYYPVvAtZu2Rd8PghDod-ZolnGrKNmClZyfiCRCe17FfM>

<https://www.nrk.no/etikk/tv-aksjon-i-nrk-siden-1974-1.6500507>

<http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/pandemiens-verdig-og-uverdige-ndhjelpmottakere/>

<http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/hvem-har-ansvar-for-smittevern-mot-covid-19/>

[http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/pinlig-taushet-fra-helsemyndighetene/,](http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/pinlig-taushet-fra-helsemyndighetene/)

<http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/smittebomber-serist/>

<http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/bortvist-pa-grunn-av-brudd-pa-anbefalinger/>

<http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/arrests-and-deportations-of-sex-workers-in-norway/>

<http://www.pion-norge.no/aktuelt/er-politiets-arbeidsmetoder-i-prostitusjonsmiljene-ulovlige/>

<https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/oAkg9B/sexarbeider-bortvises-fra-landet-broet-karantene-og-hadde-30-kunder-i-uka>

<https://www.tv2.no/a/11846475/>

Norwegian authorities

<https://www.oslo.kommune.no/koronavirus/status-om-handteringen-av-korona/10-desember-byradet-forlenger-den-sosiale-nedstengingen-til-7-januar>

<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/pressekonferanse-om-nye-tiltak-for-a-bekjempe-koronaviruset/id2693286/> <http://rosa-help.no/publikasjoner-om-menneskehandel/>

<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/innforer-de-strengeste-innreisereglene-til-norge-siden-mars-2020/id2830390/>

<https://www.oslo.kommune.no/english/coronavirus/status-reports-on-coronavirus-measures/26-october-oslo-city-government-is-asking-everyone-to-limit-social-contact-to-a-minimum>

Swedish authorities

https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/brottsbalk-1962700_sfs-1962-700

<https://regeringen.se/>

<https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2021/overdodlighet-i-europa-under-2020/>

Danish authorities

<https://coronasmitte.dk/nyt-fra-myndighederne/pressemoeder/skaerpelse-af-rejsevejledninger-og-indrejserestriktioner>

<https://en.coronasmitte.dk/corona-passport>

<https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/>

<https://sum.dk/>

<https://um.dk/da/rejse-og-ophold/rejse-til-udlandet/nyheder/newsdisplaypage/?newsID=75684BE1-0C71-46C1-B0D0-11F45A181CBB>

Finnish authorities

<https://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/ajantasa/1889/18890039001#L20>

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/muutoksia-koronavirusepidemian-vuoksi-asetettuihin-rajoituksiin-1-kesakuuta>

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/regeringen-drog-upp-riktlinjer-for-gransk kontroll-vid-de-inre-granserna-och-reserestriktioner->

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/andrade-coronarestriktioner-fran-och-med-den-1-augusti>

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/regeringen-skarpte-reserestriktionerna-vid-de-inre-och-yttre-granserna-pa-nytt->

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/regeringen-beslutade-om-skarpningar-i-villkoren-for-granstrafiken>

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/undantagsforhallanden-rader-i-finland>

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/10616/befogenheter-enligt-beredskapslagen-ska-inte-langre-utovas-undantagsforhallandena-upphor-den-27-april>

Other links

<https://www.eftasurv.int/newsroom/updates/covid-19-pandemic-esa-asks-norway-align-entry-restrictions-eea-rules:nb>

<https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2020-06-19-83>

<https://snl.no/dugnad>