

In transit: Migrants who sell sex in Norway

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Migration and the Norwegian prostitution market

Migrants have dominated the Norwegian prostitution market for over two decades. Among Pro Sentret's service users, the percentage of migrants has remained at 70 per cent and upwards since at least 2005.¹ Similarly, a mapping made by the research institute Fafo in 2008², estimated the migrant proportion to be around 80 % in Norway. This situation is not unique to Norway; in the EU and EES countries, migrants comprise 70-90 per cent of the prostitution market in "old" EU countries.³ Suffice to say that prostitution is now a mainly migration-driven phenomenon in Western and Northern Europe. |

Although migrants have been in the majority among Pro Sentret's service users since the early 2000s, there have been changes in dominant national groups. For example, in the 1990s, Pro Sentret had few foreign service users. However, this changed towards the end of the decade with the arrival of Dominican women in the street prostitution environment.⁴ By the turn of the millennium, women from former Soviet states started arriving in large numbers.⁵

From 2005 to 2015, Nigerian women were the largest group of all service users, making up about 50 % of all service users in 2013.⁶ This group started arriving in 2004 and soon came to dominate street prostitution in Oslo for over a decade. This group mainly sold sex in the street environment, and the majority were victims of human trafficking. Due to increased activity from immigration authorities and the police, many Nigerian women were expelled or received a rejection of entry since many were in Norway illegally.⁷ Others chose to leave of their own accord, experiencing the police activity as harassment.⁸ The few Nigerian women who still use Pro Sentret's services have generally received residency in Norway based on being victims of human trafficking.

Today, Pro Sentret's migrant service users are diverse regarding their country of origin. The group includes women, trans-persons and men of all ages; however, an overwhelming majority are women. In addition, very few are from Western or Northern European countries, but rather from countries with substantially lower living standards, mainly South-Eastern European and Latin American countries.

¹ Norli, Bjørg. (2006). Utenlandsk prostitusjon i Oslo. Pro Sentrets kunnskap og erfaringer. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

² Tveit, Marianne & Skilbrei, May-Len, (2008). Mangfoldig marked: Prostitusjonens omfang, innhold og organisering. Oslo: Fafo

³ Andrijasevic, R. (2013). *Sex workers and migration, Europe*. In The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration, I. Ness (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm481>

⁴ Norli, Bjørg. (2006). Utenlandsk prostitusjon i Oslo. Pro Sentrets kunnskap og erfaringer. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Pro Sentret. (2014). Året 2013. En oppsummering av aktivitetene og erfaringer. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

⁷ Pro Sentret. (2016). Året 2015. En oppsummering av aktivitetene og erfaringer. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

⁸ Ibid.

Differences between Norwegian and migrant service users

Persons who sell sex tend to be viewed as *one* group rather than made up of different groups with different needs and aspirations.

The most significant disparity between nationals and migrants who sell sex is access to health- and social services. For Pro Sentret, a service user's residency lays the basis for what services we can provide as a service provider. Although Pro Sentret's health clinic, with testing, gynaecological exams and HIV-prevention treatment, are open to everyone who sell sex, referrals to specialist healthcare are limited by the patient's residency status. Likewise, for Pro Sentret's social services, nearly all welfare benefits and programmes are limited to membership in the Norwegian national insurance scheme (folketrygden), leaving social workers with a limited toolbox for migrant service users.

Norwegian service users generally tend to sell sex to supplement other income, usually some form of state benefits (especially disability benefits). Thus, they are not necessarily relying on income from selling sex to meet basic needs. Migrants, on the other hand, are more often dependent on their income from selling sex to meet their own and often their family's basic needs. Some of the informants in our sample combined selling sex with regular work in their countries of residence. In these cases, informants treated selling sex as seasonal work, something they did for a few weeks or months per year, only to return to their regular employment for the rest of the year.

Migrant service users tend to work (selling sex) as much as possible in Norway, leaving little room for other activities. For example, Pro Sentret has previously offered various courses, such as in self-defence and yoga. Whilst courses such as these could benefit migrant service users, few participated. For migrant service users, investing time in something other than working means less income. Further, short stays in Norway also make following a course that runs over time difficult.

In sum, although making up the vast majority in Norway, migrants who sell sex have minimal access to welfare benefits and programmes that could improve their situation and provide viable economic alternatives to prostitution. Moreover, although Norway offers extensive welfare services and aid, services are conditional since they generally require Norwegian national insurance scheme membership.

Transient and settled migrants

Pro Sentret's migrant service users can be divided into transient and settled migrant categories. By transient, we mean migrants who are in Norway temporarily. Settled migrants are persons who live permanently in the country. Among those who are settled, some migrants have formalised their residency, either by a permanent residency permit or citizenship. Others have stayed in Norway clandestinely for extended periods, often years. Persons in this category may have come to Norway to sell sex, whilst others have migrated for other reasons, such as marriage with a Norwegian national.

The largest group of Pro Sentret's service users, which this report deals with, mainly belongs to the transient category. Persons within this group stay in Norway for a few weeks or months at a time, after which they return to their country of residence. Unlike the settled group, which often (but not always) has the right to welfare services, the transient group may have minimal access to said services.

Aim of the mapping

This mapping aims to provide updated knowledge for service providers and authorities on migrant groups that sell sex in Norway. Along with demographical data, such as age, origin and gender, we have looked into the following themes:

- What are the socio-economic drivers for migration?
- What makes Norway attractive as a destination?
- In what way have third parties been involved in the migration process?
- Do they have experience with human trafficking?
- Have they migrated to countries other than Norway?
- Do they have prostitution experience from other countries?

Method

Informants were recruited among Pro Sentret's service users and through outreach on platforms used for advertising sexual services. In addition, informants were recruited to provide a representative sample of Pro Sentret's migrant service users regarding the geographical origin, age and gender.

A guide was developed for the interviews, and they were conducted by Pro Sentret's staff in English, Spanish, Swedish and Romanian. Unfortunately, our budget for the mapping did not allow for the use of external interpreters. So, instead, we relied on language proficiency among staff. Unfortunately, this means certain groups were excluded, mainly Russian or Ukrainian-speaking ones not proficient in the languages covered by staff.

Staff mainly worked in pairs during the interviews, one asking questions and the other taking notes. No interviews were recorded, and notes were stripped of identifying characteristics. We conducted forty-one semi-structured interviews between late May and September 2022, and all participants received a gift card of 750 NOK for their participation.

Geographical regions and demographics

In 2022, Pro Sentret registered 516 service users, of which 75 % were registered as non-Norwegian. However, service users registered as Norwegian can also include migrants with Norwegian citizenship or permanent residency (especially Thai women who have come to Norway through marriage migration). Thus, the number of Norwegian-born users is lower, possibly substantially lower.

Geographical origin

In 2022, the largest migrant categories among Pro Sentret's service users were persons from South-Eastern EU countries (mainly Romania and Bulgaria), followed by Latin-American countries (mainly Brazil and Colombia). The third largest category was persons from South-East Asian (mainly Thailand). In addition, a relatively large group is registered as Swedish; however, these are mainly persons of Thai origin.

For privacy issues, we have decided to list informants' national origin by region, not by country. The exception is Ukrainian informants, a group discussed in a later section. However, the variety in countries within these regions is relatively small. For instance, nearly all informants listed as "Eastern Europe, Non-EU" were either from Ukraine or Russia, and all listed as "Western Europe" were Spanish nationals.

Geographical region	
Asia (South East)	6
Africa	3
Central America	2
Eastern Europe, non-EU	6
North America	1
South America	13
South Eastern Europe, EU	7
Western Europe	3
Total	41

Citizenship and country of origin

Eight informants did not hold EU citizenship: Five from Eastern Europe, non-EU countries, one from Asia (South-East) and one from North America. However, Pro Sentret was aware that many migrant service users held EU citizenship before this mapping, and this sample affirms this.

Among the thirty-three informants who held EU citizenship, a majority (twenty-one) held Spanish citizenship. Three of these were born in Spain; the others had migrated from primarily Latin America, the Philippines and, to some degree, Eastern Europe (outside of the EU) and Africa. In the case of Latin-American informants, choosing Spain as the first country to migrate

to was often related to language. In addition, although not mentioned explicitly by informants as a migration driver, Spain also has universal healthcare that covers migrants, including undocumented ones.⁹

The twelve informants who held other EU citizenship than Spanish included Romania, Belgium and Italy. Those with Romanian citizenship were all born in the country; the others were born in West Africa and Latin America, respectively.

Holding EU citizenship grants some rights in Norway. Prostitution is not considered work¹⁰ in Norway, so the EU citizen staying in the country will need to have sufficient means (minimum 158 621 NOK/ year) to finance their stay.¹¹ The EU citizen will need to be able to document this through bank statements. Further, the EU citizen will need private health insurance that covers all expenses related to illness, including pre-existing conditions.¹² The citizen is not entitled to free healthcare, financial assistance, or aid from Norwegian authorities.¹³ EU citizens who want to apply for a job may stay in Norway for up to six months if he or she reports their stay to the police within three months.¹⁴

It is unlikely that the informants with EU citizenship met all of these criteria. However, few had experienced any dealings with authorities related to this. In some cases, if they had been subjected to control by authorities, showing their passport had been sufficient. A Latin-American trans-woman, who held EU citizenship, had been taken aside at the airport and questioned. She had stated that she was in Norway to sell sex and was released shortly after.

Gender

A report by research institute FAFO in 2008, estimated that 3057 persons sold sexual services in Norway in 2008 and that 93% were women, 2 % men and 4 % transgender.¹⁵ A 2009 report by the sex worker-led network TAMPEP on the other hand, estimated that, on average, 7% of sex sellers in Europe were male in 2009.¹⁶ A report by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency estimated that among those who advertised sexual services online, 80 % were women, 15 % were men, and 5 % were trans-persons.¹⁷ Though the report used Swedish data, the situation is comparable to Norway's and corresponds with Pro Sentret's experience from outreach work on platforms that advertise sexual services.

⁹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(18\)30133-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(18)30133-6/fulltext)

¹⁰ However, the majority of Pro Sentret's migrant service users are in Norway as tourists, hence not registering with tax authorities.

¹¹ <https://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/residence-under-the-eueeu-regulations/eueeu-national-who-has-their-own-funds/?c=esp>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ <https://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/work-immigration/duty-to-report-for-job-seekers-who-are-eueeu-nationals/?c=esp>

¹⁵ Tveit, M & Skilbrei, M. Mangfoldig marked: Prostitusjonens omfang, innhold og organisering. FAFO: 2008.

¹⁶ TAMPEP. Sex work in Europe: A mapping of the prostitution scene in 25 European countries. 2009.

¹⁷ Jämställdhetsmyndigheten. 2021. Prostitution och människohandel. Slutredovisning av uppdrag att stärka arbetet mot att barn och unga respektive vuxna utnyttjas i prostitution och människohandel, samt kartlägga omfattningen av prostitution och människohandel. Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, Göteborg, januari 2021. Rapport 2021:23. Dnr: ALLM 2020/10

In 2022, Pro Sentret registered 410 women (this includes trans-women), 64 men and 42 service users with unknown/unspecified gender. In this mapping, we have strived for a sample representative of our service users regarding gender. The informants are cis-women (women who are born and identify as women. Hereafter women), cis-men (men who are born and identify as men. Hereafter men) and trans-women (women who were born as men, but identify as women). There are no trans-men in our sample. Although there are trans-men among Pro Sentret's service users, they are nationals and, therefore, beyond the scope of this mapping.

Gender	
Cis-woman	22
Cis-man	8
Trans-woman	11
	Total: 41

Pro Sentret has recently experienced an increase in transwomen, primarily from Latin America. However, our records cannot substantiate this since we register all feminine-identifying persons as women. All trans-women in our sample were either from Latin America or South-East Asia.

Age

As in the previous section, we have chosen not to disclose the exact age of informants but rather age categories.

Age category	
18-24	6
25-30	3
31-35	4
36-40	11
41-45	9
46-50	3
51 +	5

The chart above shows that the largest age category is 36-40, followed by 41-45. This corresponds with Pro Sentret's experience: relatively few of our service users are in the youngest age group. However, the majority first migrated before age thirty, with the largest group migrating before age twenty-five.

Age, the first migration	
0-11	1
11-17	6
18-24	18
25-30	7

31-35	7
36-40	2

The age of first migration indicates that Norway rarely is the first destination in one's migration journey for persons who sell sex, which corresponds with Pro Sentret's experience.

Prostitution debut

In Pro Sentret's experience, most migrant service users have, often substantial, experience selling sex before they come to Norway. As shown below, seven informants debuted when they were minors, the youngest at eleven years of age.

Prostitution debut, age group	
11-17	7
18-24	9
25-30	8
31-35	4
36-40	2
41-45	4
46 +	5

Although twelve informants made their prostitution debut in Norway, most had sold sex in other countries before arriving in Norway. Most also had prostitution experience from other countries: Out of the forty-one informants, only twelve had only sold sex in Norway. Most informants started selling sex from their late teens to late twenties.

Transient migration

Thirty-five of the forty-one informants in our sample had migrated to more than one country. Most can be defined as *transient* migrants in Norway, i.e., have not settled and or do not intend to do so. Among the informants, the majority travelled back and forth between the countries they were settled in, with the amount of time spent in Norway varying between a few weeks to months. The majority did not express wanting to settle in Norway permanently.

The majority of the informants in our sample can also be defined as *transmigrants*:

Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.¹⁸

Most held a solid connection to their home country via family and other networks and withheld financial obligations through remittances. Several informants aspired to return to their home country eventually, after saving enough money or investing enough in property, even if they had stayed upwards of twenty years abroad. There was no correlation between the time spent abroad and the wish to return to the home country.

Though many of the informants held strong ties to networks in their home country, many also had family and other networks in their country of residence. In some cases, family members had migrated before them, such as among informants who had migrated on the basis of family reunification with parents. This was particularly the case among the South-East Asian and some Latin-American informants. For example, one South-East Asian trans-woman had migrated to Spain at age thirteen to reunite with her mother. Another South-East Asian trans-woman had first left her home country for Taiwan at eighteen. Then, at twenty-eight, she migrated to Spain for family reunification as her mother had residency there.

Siblings could also migrate ahead: A woman from a Central African country described how her brother received a scholarship to study in Spain in the early nineties. Since the family did not have enough for the brother's airfare, she and her mother worked to save money. After two years, when she was twenty-two, she joined her brother in Spain.

Vulnerable migrants

To some degree, being a migrant who sells sex places an individual in a vulnerable situation regardless of the resourcefulness of the migrant. The clandestine nature of prostitution, the documented high levels of violence persons who sell sex are subjected to¹⁹ A lack of access to welfare services places all migrants who sell sex in a vulnerable and precarious situation. We would, however, suggest distinguishing between the general precarity and vulnerability that

¹⁸ Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. (1995). *From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration*. *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995): 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317464>. P. 48

¹⁹ Bjørndahl, Ulla & Norli, Bjørg. (2008). *Fritt vilt. En undersøkelse om voldserfaringene til kvinner i prostitusjon*. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

affects all migrants who sell sex and the particular individual and structural factors that renders an individual *especially vulnerable*. In a previous report²⁰ We defined these characteristics as financial destitution in the home country (or country of residence), lack of education/illiteracy, minority background and reduced cognitive ability. Whilst many of the informants in our sample had experienced, e.g., financial destitution in their home country, a factor that indeed informed their decision to migrate, only six had most or all of the characteristics described above.

Of the six vulnerable migrants, five (all women) came from a Roma background; four came from a South Eastern EU country and one from a Western EU country. The Roma are Europe's most significant minority, with about 70 % residing in Central and South-Eastern Europe.²¹ The Roma are a heterogenous group; however, marginalisation and poverty are rife within the population, with 80 % living below the poverty line in Bulgaria and Romania.²² Pro Sentret has documented Roma persons who sell sex in two previous reports.²³

Although one of the Roma informants came from a Western EU country, all Roma described precarious living conditions and a lack of employment opportunities in their home countries. In addition, all of the Roma informants were illiterate and had minimal education. The South Eastern European informants also described discrimination and racism in their home countries.

The sixth informant, whom we identified as particularly vulnerable, was an eighteen-year-old man from a Western EU country. He, too, came from a minority background; both parents had migrated from a North African country and could not provide for him financially. He had done "criminal things" but preferred selling sex to doing this. He started selling sex in his home country at age fifteen. He had placed ads on the MSM app Grindr in Norway as an experiment. As he received much positive feedback on the app, he decided to come to Norway to sell sex (at the time of the interview, he had only been in Norway for a few days). His girlfriend in his home country was pregnant, and he wanted to provide for her and their child.

Of the six informants we identified as especially vulnerable, four had only ever migrated to Norway. This starkly contrasts most informants, who often had substantial migration experience. Whether this is coincidental or an indication of a pattern among vulnerable migrants who sell sex in Norway, we do not know. However, it should be investigated further by Pro Sentret or other actors.

Facilitators in migration

Apart from the three informants whom we defined as victims of human trafficking (this will be discussed in another section), most of the informants described informal, rather than organised, networks as instrumental in facilitating their migration. Most commonly, friends

²⁰ Kock, Ida. (2017) Vulnerable persons from Bulgaria and Romania who sell sex sexual services in Oslo. Experiences from Pro Sentret and other actors in Oslo. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

²¹ Ringold et al. (2005). Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the poverty cycle. Washington DC: World Bank.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kock, Ida. (2017) Vulnerable persons from Bulgaria and Romania who sell sex sexual services in Oslo. Experiences from Pro Sentret and other actors in Oslo. Oslo: Pro Sentret., Kock, Ida. (2018). Between a rock and a hard place. The unseen category of young Roma men selling sex in Oslo and beyond. Oslo: Pro Sentret.

and, in some cases, family members already in the country helped with practical information, finding accommodation and other practical assistance.

However, some had had involvement by third parties. One informant, a Latin-American woman in her late thirties, described a situation that qualifies as organised third-party involvement. She started selling sex in Denmark in 2018. She had been recruited by a Russian woman (whom she described as a "madam"). The Russian woman helped her set up and took 50 % of her earnings. She only worked for the Russian woman for fifteen days to determine if she could tolerate the job. She returned to Denmark and the madam later that year, but now she only paid the madam for rent. She has worked independently since 2019 and came to Norway without third-party involvement.

While few in our sample had come to Norway using organised facilitators, Pro Sentret is aware of using so-called "agencies", especially among women from Russia and Ukraine. A woman from an Eastern-European, non-EU country stated that she had come independently to Norway but needed around 5000 euros (which she had) to establish herself with an apartment, telephone number and advertisements. For girls who did not have the funds for this, the only other option was to come via an "agency". In Pro Sentret's experience, using an agency is most closely associated with women from Eastern European countries, especially Russia and Ukraine. Pro Sentret has been aware of the use of agencies, often located in Russia, for some years. These agencies offer to arrange travel, accommodation and bookings with clients in exchange for a percentage of earnings (often 50 %). These businesses fall well within the Norwegian legal definition of controlling and facilitating prostitution, however,²⁴ Pro Sentret has seen few indications of the use of force and threats by so-called agencies to control the women working for them. Instead, service users have described using an agency as a practical way of establishing themselves, only to return and work independently on their second visit to Norway.

In some cases, informants had received help migrating to one country but not others. For example, a young woman from a South-Eastern EU country described how she had first gone to Germany to sell sex and that it was "easy" to start, so she needed no help. However, when she decided to go to Norway, she received help establishing herself from a friend who had already worked in Norway. She likely refers to working in a brothel in Germany (where they are legal), making it "easy" to start working since she did not need to place advertisements and find a place to work from.

A Latin-American woman in her early thirties had a friend who suggested they should both go to Norway. They did not know anything about the country but came in contact with a man who rented out rooms to escorts in Oslo. He also helped set up ads and transfer money abroad. The man charged them for the room and did not take a percentage of their earnings, but he swindled them with money transfers. She soon decided to cut contact with this man.

²⁴ <https://lovdata.no/NLE/lov/2005-05-20-28/§315>

Human trafficking

In the sample, three out of forty-one informants were identified as victims of human trafficking: Two transwomen and one woman. All were from Latin American countries. None of these informants were currently in a trafficking situation and, in most cases, had not been since the 1990s. Two informants had been trafficked outside their home countries, and one had been internally trafficked.

Two of the informants had been trafficked as children. One described how she grew up in an impoverished household and wanted to provide for her family. A trafficker recruited her at age thirteen in the early 1990s. She was lured to Spain by the trafficker under the pretence of a regular job. In Spain, she was put to work immediately. She was installed in a house in a wealthy part of a city in Catalonia. She had no previous sexual experience and was forced to serve several clients during her first night. In addition to being in debt to the traffickers for plane tickets and documents, she had to pay for housing, food, clothing and medical care. She had to make a certain amount of money each day; otherwise, she was beaten. She contracted several STDs and had to pay for her treatment. Since she could not work during her treatment, her debt increased tenfold. Some girls were forced to have back-alley abortions, for which they had to pay for themselves. Others tried to escape by jumping from the third floor. She was in this situation for a year when a client, 30 years her senior, fell in love with her and "bought her out" for the equivalent of about 7000 euros. She married the client soon after when she was fifteen. The client did not know her actual age, and after she told him, they stopped having sex. He later died and left her an inheritance. She expressed that this type of trafficking is no longer common for women from South America. Most are now older and work independently (i.e., no pimp) in, for example, flats (in Spain).

A transwoman described how she had been forced to start selling sex at age eleven and was "forced" by another person. This informant provided very little detail, as she was severely traumatised. However, based on her age and the fact that she was forced to sell sex, we identify her as a victim of internal trafficking.

The third informant, in her early forties, whom we identified as a victim of human trafficking, had a more recent experience. She had been in Belgium during the pandemic and got a tip from some other girls that there was a forum/chat group on Telegram. Here she came in contact with a "mafia group from Russia/Ukraine/ Belarus. These people facilitated transport and provided flats in several cities. She was instructed to meet a liaison in Warsaw to be transported to Norway with other (Eastern European) girls, and she entered Norway illegally. She worked for these people in several apartments around Oslo for a month, after which she contacted Pion²⁵ and Pro Sentret and received aid in leaving the situation. She is now receiving assistance from ROSA²⁶.

The relatively low number of informants that we identified as victims of human trafficking does not necessarily provide an accurate estimation of the actual number of victims in our sample.

²⁵ A Norwegian sex worker organisation. <http://www.pion-norge.no/>

²⁶ An organisation that provides aid for victims of human trafficking. <http://rosa-help.no/om-rosa/>

The level of detail the informants provided about their migration journeys varied significantly. Although most informants mentioned friends and/or family members as facilitators, this does not necessarily mean exploitation did not occur in these cases. We did, however, not see many indications of organised trafficking in our sample.

Migration drivers

Most migrants from poorer countries do not end up selling sex. However, most persons selling sex in Western and Northern Europe are migrants. Nearly all of the informants in our sample are from countries with a substantially lower standard of living than Norway. Although some left their home countries to sell sex, others left to find regular jobs. Entering prostitution came after a loss of employment or finding the regular job too stressful or poorly paid. There is a tendency to view migrants who sell sex as a separate migration group. Our sample shows that migrants who sell sex are part of a global migration of persons seeking better living conditions in countries with higher living standards and more economic opportunities. There is nothing inherently *different* between migrants that sell sex and other migrants that leaves their countries to improve their economic situation.

Although relative or absolute poverty is the main driving factor for individuals to enter prostitution globally, our sample shows that poverty or economic impairment may interact with other, more individual factors. These factors may include discrimination (based on gender or sexual or other minority statuses) and more individual factors such as wanting to experience other cultures. Nearly all informants in our sample stated financial reasons for migrating, but other factors may influence the decision to migrate. Below, we will present some of the often-interacting reasons for migrating.

Lack of (economic) opportunity

Many of the informants described a financial situation that was characterised by a lack of economic opportunity rather than extreme poverty. In many cases, they had held regular jobs (mainly in the service industry) either in their home countries or in the country where they first migrated. Although basic needs were met, working conditions were often unsatisfactory, and wages were low.

One informant, a woman from a Central African country, described how she, even with a university degree in administration, could not make ends meet in her home country. So she left for Spain when she was twenty-one and worked in the hotel industry, where she developed back problems. She started selling sex in Norway when she was forty-one to pay for private medical treatment, something her wages from the hotel business would not cover.

A transwoman from a South Eastern Asian country had first migrated at 18 to Taiwan to work. Then, in her late twenties came to Spain for family reunification with her mother. She worked as a restaurant manager in Spain for 11 years before leaving for Norway to sell sex in her early fifties. She described her work as a restaurant manager as brutal, with extended hours. She planned to sell sex for a year to save money.

A South American woman had worked as a secretary for an insurance company in her home country and sold sex in the evenings and weekends for extra income. However, the financial situation was difficult, and she needed money for her family, so she left for Spain in her late twenties.

A woman in her early fifties from an Eastern-European, non-EU country described her situation as challenging in her home country. However, she was financially well off working as a hairdresser. She wanted to divorce her husband, but he refused. Further, after the fall of the Soviet Union, it had become easier to travel to other countries. She first migrated to Spain in 2000 because she had heard that it was easy to make a lot of money picking grapes. However, things were not as she thought; she did not make much money and had problems with her identity papers. She had promised her mother and daughter she would come back with enough money to buy an apartment. She says she "fooled herself" into believing it would be easy to make money. She became depressed, but she also started to like it in Spain. She was an illegal immigrant until 2006 when she got residency. She worked as a hairdresser in Spain between 2007 and 2017, even owning her salon for a few years. However, she felt she was not appreciated for her work (describing the physical toil, servicing clients, constantly updating her technique etc.) and only making about 1000 euros per month despite her labour. Some hairdresser friends sold sex in Norway and did well financially, so on their recommendation, she tried it. She described how she could earn three months' wages (in Spain) in one month selling sex in Norway.

Extreme poverty

Some informants described either growing up or living in extreme poverty in their home countries. This was the case for several African and Latin American women and transwomen.

A West African woman in her early fifties describes living in extreme poverty in her home country. She describes how polygamy, which she strongly dislikes, contributed to her family's financial hardship; her father had four wives and twenty-one children. In order to support her family, she started selling sex in her home country at age seventeen or eighteen. She describes the experience as terrible and that she "was ugly" because she had a shaved head, as her family could not afford hairdressers. Nevertheless, she managed to get a visa to travel to Italy to buy goods to sell in her home country. She eventually migrated to Italy permanently, where she worked as a carer for the elderly as well as in domestic work, but it eventually became difficult for foreigners to find work. A friend recommended she go to Norway to find work, but she has not found regular work outside of selling sex.

Belonging to a minority group, ethnic, sexual or other, may severely affect one's financial outcome. Pro Sentret has previously written reports on Roma people who sell sex (insert ref). All informants with Roma identity described extreme poverty and destitution in their home countries. A Roma woman from a South-Eastern EU country in her late forties described how she first came to Norway 10 years ago. She first came to Norway to beg and collect bottles, but she described this as impossible now as people no longer carry cash. She started selling sex two months prior to the interview. Her financial situation in her home country is

challenging; she supports her children, aged seven and twelve, and her elderly parents. The parents, who are illiterate like herself, have no pension and no formal employment experience. She has a heart condition that she needs medication for, and causes pain in her legs, something that makes sleeping rough or in the Salvation Army's shelter extremely hard. Her children are in school and are doing well, but she misses them greatly. She has not seen her children in four months. It costs her 3000 NOK to travel and return to her home country, and she would rather the children have that money: "A mother does everything for her kids; the alternative is that they go to children's home."

Another Roma woman from a South European EU country first came to Norway 17 years ago. She describes her childhood as one of abject poverty, and she was married at seventeen. In her home country, she did seasonal agricultural work. The first time she came to Norway, she stayed begging on the streets for four months. She then returned to her home country to live with her mother and siblings. Conditions were terrible; it was winter, and they slept on the floor. There and then, she decided to return to Norway to sell sex. She was then 23 years old.

Although most of the Roma-identifying informants in our sample are from South-Eastern EU, a Roma woman from a Western-European country described similar conditions; poor household, no education (she is illiterate) and only work experience from agricultural and domestic work. When she could not find work in her home country, she migrated to Norway with her boyfriend to find work. Unable to do so, she slept rough on the streets; she started selling sex to support her and her boyfriend. Unfortunately, having no knowledge of sexual or reproductive health, such as how to use a condom, she contracted an STD. After first migrating in 2012, she had been commuting between Norway, Sweden and her home country.

Sexual minority status and gender as a migration driver

Out of eleven transwomen in our sample, eight came from Latin- American countries. All the Latin-American transwomen were in their late thirties to mid-fifties, but most had a long history of migration and sex work. While the three transwomen who were not Latin-American (all from a South-East Asian country) did not specifically mention discrimination because of their gender expression, nearly all Latin-American transwomen did.

One transwoman in our sample was kicked out of her parental home due to her gender expression, forcing her to fend for herself on the street at sixteen. Another informant, who had come out as trans at an older age, described being shunned by her family, including her children. Other transwomen described extreme discrimination, including violence. One informant was forced to leave her home country due to threats from criminal gangs for being an LGBTQ activist.

Many mentioned the lack of job opportunities for transwomen in their home countries; selling sex or being a hairdresser were often the only options. One informant, who had worked as a hairdresser for many years, saw no (financial) future in her business. That, in combination with discrimination and harassment of transwomen, made her leave her home country to sell sex in Europe. She was then thirty-six years old. Another trans-woman described how training to

become a hairdresser was not an option, as she was living on the street and needed money to survive there and then.

Three of the transwomen had started selling sex as teenagers or children. In one case, the informant was forced by a pimp to sell sex at eleven years of age. Another informant, now in her mid-forties, needed to support her poor, single mother and therefore started selling sex at age thirteen or fourteen. She had observed other trans-women selling sex on the street in her hometown and realised she could make money from selling sex. At fifteen, she migrated to Belgium. She stressed that she used her money without third-party involvement in her migration. She described arriving in Europe as extremely stressful; she was alone in a new country, missing her mother, and the only way to communicate with her was by using payphones (which was very expensive). When she started working on the street in Belgium, a mafia (or gang) demanded money (around 1000 Belgian francs) from the trans-women daily; otherwise, they would be beaten. After a while, the girls got fed up and reported the gang to the police. The gang was eventually convicted, and the problem was resolved.

The men who were gay/queer did not mention sexual orientation as a migration driver. Two of the eight men in the sample specified that they defined themselves as straight (but they sold sex to men).

Remittances

Being able to provide for a family is a significant migration driver. Only five informants stated that they do not send remittances to family members. The size of remittances varied greatly, from small contributions (such as gifts) to having one's family entirely economically dependent on oneself. There are no discernible differences in gender, geographical origin or age regarding remittances. Parents, own children and siblings were the family members most commonly mentioned as beneficiaries of remittances, but also nieces and, to a degree, friends.

Several family members were often wholly dependent on informants' remittances. For example, a transwoman in her late forties supported her mother and sisters living in Spain. The mother and sisters were unemployed. Her family had shunned her because of her gender expression, and although the conflict was not resolved, she felt obliged to help them. She also supported her four children; one was biological, and the other three were her sisters' children, whom she had guardianship over.

A trans-woman from a South-East Asian country helped her sister, a single mother who lived in the UK, by sending around 1000 GBP per month. The sister knew she was selling sex, but her parents did not. She described how she would treat her parents to restaurant meals but did not give them money directly as they would be suspicious of where she got them.

A West-African woman supported her parents as well as her children. Although she was critical of her parents, particularly her father, she still supported them with basics and medical expenses, exclaiming: "They would die otherwise!"

Some informants had previously supported family members. For example, a Latin-American woman stated that she used to support her siblings and paid for their (private) university education. However, they now have jobs and can support themselves. Although she now only supports herself, she is still generous with gifts for her family. A transwoman from Latin America described how she used to support her parents when they were alive but still helps her nieces. When she was little, she never got any gifts or celebrated her birthday, so she started a tradition in her hometown where she buys 100 gifts for children that are distributed at Christmas.

Other migration drivers

Whilst all in the sample had financial reasons for migrating to sell sex, some informants had more clear financial goals. These informants tended to view selling sex as a temporary endeavour, often to save up for a specific goal, such as financing university studies or setting up a business goal outside of prostitution. Neither of these informants came from extreme poverty, and they tended to be better educated.

A Latin-American man in his mid-twenties was studying to become a dentist in his home country. The five-year programme was expensive, so he had been coming to Norway since 2020 to sell sex. He stayed for three months at a time in order to not overstay his tourist visa. He never sold sex in his home country, and nobody, especially not his family, back home was aware that he was selling sex in Norway. He described his life back home as "completely different". He was from a middle-upper-class background.

A woman in her early twenties from a South-Eastern European EU country had started selling sex in Germany at age twenty. She did this to finance her studies in nursing. By the time of the interview, she had graduated and planned to stop selling sex when she got a position as a nurse. Since she liked Norway, she planned to apply for nursing jobs here.

Another woman, also from a South-Eastern European EU country, described how she used to work in accountancy for a firm, but that pay was poor, and she was expected to work much overtime. Her mother had died when she was still at university. She started selling sex in several European countries in her late twenties for the financial benefits and security it provided. Selling sex had enabled her to invest in rental properties in her home country, and she had a goal of starting a transport business in future.

A North-American man in his early thirties used selling sex to finance travelling around Europe. He had never sold sex in his home country but had started doing online porn on OnlyFans in 2020. Eventually, his patrons asked to meet him in person. He went to Norway to sell sex after hearing clients paid well here.

A woman in her early twenties from an Eastern European non-EU country had recently finished her training as a hairdresser. She had been selling sex for a few years to save money to open a hair salon. Another woman, in her early thirties, originally from a South Asian country but with EU citizenship, combined working as a receptionist with selling sex as a *sugar baby* in order to

improve her lifestyle back home. Being a sugar baby enabled her to treat herself to shopping and hotel stays and provide extra income (she received "pocket money" from her client).

A South Eastern Asian man in his early forties first visited Sweden twenty years ago to visit relatives. There, he met and married a Swedish man. His motivations for leaving his home country included wanting to travel and experience other cultures and a love of nature and cold climates. He had a vocational degree in marketing from his home country and had held various jobs in Sweden, including in elderly care, shop assistant and as a waiter. He spoke English when he arrived and later learned the local language fluently. After losing his job during the COVID-19 pandemic, he decided to migrate to Oslo, where he had a friend, describing this as a chance to "try something new". In Oslo, he started working in a massage parlour that also provided sexual services. He had no previous experience of selling sex.

A note on the war in Ukraine

Concern has been raised about whether the war in Ukraine will make women and minors vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation in Europe. It is, however, worth noting that Ukraine had a large sex industry prior to the war. In total, thirty-one service users were registered as Ukrainian in 2022 in Pro Sentret's records, an increase of only four persons since 2021. Thus, we did not see a significant increase in Ukrainian service users during the first year of the war, but that may change as the conflict rages on.

Out of the handful of Ukrainian women in our sample, only one had started selling sex as a direct result of the war. A well-educated woman, she had a high-paying job in her home country. She had been on a business trip in an EU country when the war broke out. She decided to go to Norway, as she had been there for a holiday in 2019. Due to the conflict, she was now in the process of applying for asylum. Her mother did not want to leave home, and her sister did not want to leave her mother. Although she had no previous experience selling sex, she now felt that she had to do so to support her mother and sister back home. She worked independently, with no third-party involvement.

The other Ukrainian women in our sample all had experience selling sex prior to the war. The war in itself had not been a driver to migrate to sell sex, but all of them were now in Norway under the collective protection status²⁷ granted to Ukrainian refugees in Norway.

A woman in her mid-thirties started selling sex in the Emirates when she was in her mid-twenties. She had been introduced to the work by a friend who sold sex there. She worked for the royal family in the Emirates as part of a "harem". The girls of the harem were paid per day, and the job did not necessarily involve sexual activities. She first came to Norway to sell sex in 2020. She had returned several times since then and had been in Norway for around a year in total at the time of the interview. She now stayed more permanently because of the war and her refugee status, something she had wanted to do before the war. Before the war and

²⁷ <https://www.udi.no/en/information-ukraine-and-russia/situation-in-ukraine/>

receiving refugee status, she had found it extremely difficult to rent an apartment and open a bank account as a non-EU citizen.

A Ukrainian woman late thirties had worked in seasonal work in Russia since 2014, but she had returned home regularly. Most of her family lived in Russia but held Ukrainian passports. As her parents were Ukrainian citizens, their situation in Russia was immensely dire, which was a great source of stress for her. In addition, her nineteen-year-old son remained in Ukraine since men over 18 were not allowed to leave the country (due to being drafted). She started selling sex in Asian countries (she did not specify which) three years ago, but never in her home country or in Russia. She chose to come to Norway because she had been here before (she had had a Norwegian boyfriend), but she did not plan to settle. Instead, she wanted to migrate to the US and reunite with her son.

Why Norway?

The most common reason for choosing to migrate to Norway was having a friend who described good earning potential in the country. The informants often had little to no knowledge of Norway before coming. Thus, the choice to migrate to Norway was related to informal networks instead of actively seeking out information themselves. With their knowledge of how to set themselves up, the friends in Norway made the migration process less precarious.

Not all of the informants had a network in Norway. For example, an eighteen-year-old man from a Western European EU country described how he placed ads on Grindr (a dating app for men who have sex with men that are also used for advertising sexual services) in Norway whilst he was still in his home country. Since he received positive responses, he decided to come to Norway by himself, despite not knowing anyone here. A woman from an Eastern-European, non-EU country had heard that Norway was a friendly country but did not have much knowledge. However, she stated that she loved the tv-series "Vikings" (which was set in Norway during the Viking age), which contributed to her coming here.

Although their experiences of the country were often positive (clients tended to be respectful, earnings), only a handful of the informants expressed a desire to migrate permanently to Norway.

Adverse experiences in Norway

The Norwegian language was described as a challenge for informants who did not speak English. Many of the Latin-American informants spoke only Spanish, making communication difficult. Others described difficulties adapting to the cold climate and generally high prices. Some informants described how they intended to find regular work in Norway. However, due to a lack of language skills and formal work experience, selling sex was often the only option to support oneself.

Very few informants had had adverse experiences with the police or immigration authorities. The majority held EU passports, which could partially explain this, but interestingly none of the non-EU citizens described having such experiences either.

A West-African woman with EU residency had a bad experience with a police officer. She tried to help a woman from another African country who was unwell and sleeping at the central railway station. She bought her some food, but the woman was in a terrible state. She located a police officer to aid her, but the officer was only interested in the informant's residency status, ignoring the unwell woman. Though she does not explicitly mention it, there is reason to assume that some degree of racial profiling played a part in the police officer's treatment of her.

Some informants had experienced problems with the police in other countries. For example, a woman from a South-Eastern European EU country had an experience with the police in Stockholm, Sweden. On her second day, the police raided her apartment and charged all her clients. The same thing happened again when she moved into a hotel a few days later. However, she described the police as respectful, and they only asked her about trafficking/pimping. Norwegian police seemed much less interested in charging clients, so she found it easier to work here.

Conclusions and the way forward

The main aim of this mapping has been to look into the specifics of the migration journey for persons who sell sex: What acts as a push factor to leave one's home country, and what pulls people to start selling sex in Norway?

Our sample shows that for most, Norway is not the first destination in informants' migration journeys or the first country informants sold sex in. A majority also held EU citizenship. In some cases, especially among persons from South-Eastern Europe, they were born in an EU country. Most had, however, migrated to an EU country from Latin America, South-East Asia or a non-EU Eastern European country. Only a handful of informants expressed a wish to live in Norway permanently.

Not surprisingly, the main driver for leaving one's home country was a lack of economic opportunity or poverty, in some cases extreme poverty. In addition, especially among Latin-American transwomen, gender-based discrimination and harassment were migration drivers. Finally, for some informants, financing studies, wanting to travel, or saving up for a specific goal were drivers to migrate to sell sex.

Six informants were identified as especially vulnerable. Five of these identified as Roma, all EU citizens. In the case of the Roma informants, several had turned to selling sex after other income streams dried up, namely begging. Begging was described as no longer feasible since people in Norway had stopped carrying cash. The drive towards a cashless society in Norway,

exacerbated during the pandemic, has negative implications for extremely vulnerable migrant groups, including driving persons into prostitution.

A majority had sold sex in other countries before arriving in Norway. In some cases, informants had had their prostitution debut in their home countries, others in the country where they first migrated. Others still had sold sex in several European countries but never in their countries of residence. Most had started selling sex between the ages of eighteen to thirty. Many had experience from regular work, particularly in the service or beauty industries.

Most informants described relying on private networks, mainly friends, to receive information and aid in migrating. Though we saw little indication of exploitation within these private networks, further studies are needed on this subject.

Very few informants stated they had been victims of human trafficking or other types of organised crime during their migration journeys. However, this does not necessarily reflect the reality. Informants may have withheld information or did not view the “facilitators” as exploitative. The use of so-called “agencies” described by an Eastern-European informant needs to be monitored closely in future, especially in the wake of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

As mentioned in this report, prostitution is now mainly a migration-driven phenomenon in Norway. The report has shown how most informants sold sex in Norway on a seasonal basis, with informants typically staying for a few weeks or months. This fact has implications for service provision for persons who sell sex. In order to ensure the safety of persons who sell sex, service provision for the group must be focussed on providing services outside of regular health and welfare services, not on services mandated by a person’s membership in the Norwegian national insurance scheme (folketrygden). Pro Sentret, and other service providers, who provide specialised health and social services for persons who sell sex, regardless of residency status, are crucial in reducing harm and identifying exploitation (including trafficking) among persons who sell sex.

There is a need for updated knowledge on migrants who sell sex in Norway. Unfortunately, few systematic studies have been carried out; this mapping is only a small contribution. Moreover, the mapping has limitations, primarily since informants were mainly recruited among Pro Sentret’s service users.

The focus of this mapping has not been the experience of selling sex in Norway but rather on the informants’ migration journeys and experiences during migration. A follow-up study on migrants’ experiences with Norwegian authorities, service providers and experiences of violence in Norway will need to be carried out in future.

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