

THE SOCIAL CONTROL OF SEX WORK

Comparative study of
Seattle, WA, USA vs Amsterdam,
NL

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2025



WHAT IS SEX WORK?

It is broadly defined as the consensual exchange of sexual services between adults for money, goods, or other benefits. This exchange can take various forms such as, street-based, brothels, escorting, erotic dancing, pornography, webcamming, phone sex, and other sexual or erotic services.

Legal Frameworks on Sex Work

Criminalization - All aspects of sex work including selling sex, buying sex, and third-party involvement (brothel-keeping, pimping) are illegal. Both sex workers and buyers can be prosecuted.

Partial Decriminalization - Selling sex is not a crime, but buying sex, or organizing the sale of sex (such as brothel-keeping or procuring), is criminalized. The focus is on penalizing clients and third parties, aiming to reduce demand.

Full Decriminalization - All criminal penalties for consensual adult sex work are removed. The government does not criminalize or specially regulate sex work beyond applying ordinary labor and business laws.

Legalization - Prostitution is legal but subject to government regulation, such as licensing, zoning, mandatory health checks, and restrictions on where and how sex work can take place.

OVERVIEW OF SEATTLE POLICIES



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"End Demand" Initiative

aka

The Nordic Model

- The 'End Demand' approach targets the clients of sex work rather than the workers themselves, aiming to shift the legal consequences towards buyers.
- This program seeks to reduce human trafficking and discourage exploitation within the sex industry.
- Still leaves many sex work-related offenses like loitering or trespassing intact, meaning sex workers remain vulnerable to arrest and prosecution for related charges.

Stay Out of Area of Prostitution (SOAP Zones)

What is the SOAP law?

- This law reinstates a sex worker loitering ordinance and establishes a sex work banishment zone along Aurora Avenue in North Seattle.
- Judges can ban individuals charged with sex work-related offenses from these areas.

Penalties:

- Violating the SOAP order is a gross misdemeanor, punishable by up to 364 days in jail and/or a \$5,000 fine. Orders can be issued even if the person has only been charged, not convicted, and can be a condition of release from jail

Seattle's Municipality Codes

Chapter 12A.10 - OFFENSES AGAINST PUBLIC MORALS

- 12A.10.010 - Prostitution loitering
- 12A.10.020 - Prostitution.
- 12A.10.030 - Promoting loitering for the purpose of prostitution
- 12A.10.040 - Policies governing arrests for prostitution and prostitution loitering
- 12A.10.050 - Prostitution and sexual exploitation—No defense
- 12A.10.060 - Permitting prostitution.
- 12A.10.070 - Mandatory fee for defendant convicted of or entering into a diversion agreement or deferred prosecution for a prostitution-related offense or indecent exposure; forfeiture of funds used as part of prostitution-related offenses
- 12A.10.080 - Body studios
- 12A.10.090 - Public display of erotic material.

- 12A.10.100 - Urinating in public
- 12A.10.110 - Convicted persons—Mandatory counseling and costs for certain offenses
- 12A.10.115 - Impoundment of vehicle used in sexual exploitation
- 12A.10.120 - Voyeurism in public places
- 12A.10.150 - Disclosing intimate images
- 12A.10.160 - Unlicensed massage or reflexology

Chapter 12A.11 - STAY OUT OF AREA OF PROSTITUTION ZONES

- 12A.11.010 - Definitions
- 12A.11.020 - Issuance of order
- 12A.11.030 - Violation of order
- 12A.11.040 - Modification and termination of order
- 12A.11.050 - Creation, evaluation, modification, and termination of SOAP zone

Field Work - Observations

July 5th 7 - 8:30 PM (Saturday):

- 25-30 Sex workers on sidewalk. Some spread out and some in groups 2-3.
- 4 Police cars in area. Minding their own business.
- 3 client transactions.

July 10th 6:30 - 8 PM (Thursday):

- 20-25 Sex Workers on sidewalk.
- 3 Police cars in area. Minding their own business.
- One hotel allowed sex workers.
- Most motels/inns are gated (6/8 I noticed).

Other Observations:

- Heavily populated area with many businesses, dealerships, restaurants, spas, motels/inns, golf courses and K-12 schools along/by the street.
- Ages 18-25.
- Most workers are BIPOC.
- High drug area.
- Not much police activity for high "crime" area.

Field Work - Interviews

Interviews with Sex Workers

Police Perception:

- Most do not have a positive relationship with law enforcement or trust them to help their safety.
- "I get raped, molested, and beat but I could never call the police because it is illegal f**cking business."
- One mentioned her interactions with law enforcement were respectful and informative.

Access to Resources:

- Mixed input. Some know there are organizations or services in Seattle that they can rely on for support, health care, or legal advice but they don't utilize them.
- Some didn't know about any resources.

What do you wish government/public understood:

- "Consenting adults should be free to do as they please."
- "We're human like everyone else, and it's no more than job."

Interviews

pt2

Interviews with Motels/Inns

How is business affected:

- "People are scared and do not want to come here because of this, there is a day shelter down the street that is bad for business too."
- All have receive negative reviews online regarding sex workers outside and other dangers.
- Motel's workers have conflicts when they turn down people trying to buy a room for sex workers

Police Perception:

- They all do call the police if the issues is very serious, but the relationship is not positive.
- Trends of police showing up hours after initial call from hotels. All they the police do not do much to help the safety of the business.

Other:

- 2 motels reported have trainings on recognizing and responding to signs of trafficking and exploitation.
- 1 Motel was allowing sex workers even though it's illegal.

OVERVIEW OF AMSTERDAM POLICES

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Amsterdams Legalization Approach

Amsterdam's approach to sex work combines legalization with regulation, establishing a legal framework that prioritizes worker rights and safety. This model includes licensing systems for brothels and sex workers, aiming to normalize the industry.



HOW TO BECOME A SEX WORKER LEGALLY

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Starting as a self-employed sex worker

Self-employed sex workers need to register with the Chamber of Commerce before they start.

Conditions for starting as a sex worker

To start as a sex worker in Amsterdam, you must have the following:

- Registration at the [Chamber of Commerce](#) (KvK)
- Dutch nationality or the nationality of another country in the European Economic Area (EEA)
- Valid residency status
- A registered address in the Municipal Personal Records Database (*Gemeentelijke Basisregistratie Personen*, BRP)
- A Citizen Service Number (*burgerservicenummer*, BSN)
- A bank account.

In addition, you must:

- Be at least 21 years old.

How to register at the Chamber of Commerce

- Make an appointment with the [Chamber of Commerce](#) (*Kamer van Koophandel/KvK*).
- Bring a valid proof of identity: your passport or ID.
- Register under the neutral category of 'personal services'. This way the precise nature of your work is not visible.
- Use a professional name or some other 'neutral' business name, not your own name. You can also ask for your private address not to be listed in the register, so it cannot be seen by others.



The Redlight District

- The redlight district is the oldest district in Amsterdam, sex work has existed in the area since the 14th century, when sailors arrived at the port.
- Known for its iconic red-lit windows, it is a symbol of Dutch tolerance with around 300 window brothels.
- Amsterdam has three main redlight districts, all legally recognized and regulated:
 - De Wallen (Red Light District / Old City Center)
 - Singelgebied (Singel Red Light District)
 - Ruysdaelkade (De Pijp District)
- Today it is also home to adult theaters, sex shops, museums like the Sex Museum and Red Light Secrets, coffeeshops, and bars.



Window Sex Work Regulation

- Window sex work allows sex workers to operate from designated spaces. You can rent a window or small room from a licensed brothel operator.
- Most workers are licensed as independent contractors.
- Windows are run like a hairdresser in a Salon. They rent a room, set their hours, they set their own rates and prices for services, and they have the right to refuse anyone.
- Hours of service 10AM - 6AM.
- Safety Regulations:
 - RLD is monitored 24/7 by police.
 - Highly visible area with lots of surrounding businesses.
 - Inside rooms there are 3–5 panic buttons hidden inside, some connected to police station.
 - Main screen connected to all the security cameras inside, they are never in the rooms but everywhere outside.
 - Subjected to surprise inspections to ensure laws are followed and regulated.



- Brothels are licensed and regulated by local governments. They must meet strict standards for health, safety, and working conditions.
 - Licenses cost about 10,000 Euros and last 5 years.
 - Brothel owners must undergo extensive background checks to ensure they have no criminal ties.
 - Frequent inspections by city officials, police, and health authorities.
- The workers may be self-employed or work for the brothel, depending on the setup.
- Work environment is typically indoors out of public view for clients who prefer anonymity. Where clients can choose from a list of workers in the brothel.

Project 1012

Key Actions:

- Closed or repurposed window brothels linked to crime.
- Restricted cannabis coffee shops.
- Encouraged creative and upscale businesses.
- Bought out buildings from "criminal-linked" owners.

Objectives:

- Combat human trafficking & organized crime.
- Reduce over-tourism.
- Promote livability for residents.
- Diversify the local economy.

Criticism:

- Displacement of sex workers.
- Gentrification concerns.
- Questionable effectiveness on crime reduction.



Visibility and Public Perception

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- Sex work is mostly criminalized, with some focus on penalizing buyers.
- These laws often push sex work underground, making it less visible.
- Reduced visibility increases risks and vulnerability for sex workers.
- Creates barriers to accessing health care and social services.
- Limits community awareness and support for sex workers.

AMSTERDAM

- Amsterdam's legalization makes sex work more visible and accepted.
- Increased visibility helps challenge social stigma around the profession.
- Legal status supports greater understanding and normalization of sex work.
- Contributes to social integration and recognition of sex workers' rights.
- Still problems of sexual citizenship and who get to legally be a sex worker.

Impact on Worker Rights and Safety

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- Selling sex is tolerated, but **buying and related activities remain criminalized**.
- **Legal ambiguity** creates fear of police interaction or prosecution.
- Sex workers often don't report violence or abuse due to **fear of legal consequences**, giving buyers more power of the exchange.
- **Lack of safe, legal workplaces** increases exposure to dangerous environments.
- Criminalization of clients and third parties **isolates workers from support systems**.
- Ongoing **whore stigma** reinforces marginalization and vulnerability to exploitation.
- No formal **labor protections** or workplace rights for sex workers.

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- **Legal protections** allow workers to report abuse or exploitation without fear of arrest.
- Access to **health services**, including STI testing and sexual health education.
- Workers can operate as **self-employed professionals** and register with tax authorities.
- Eligible for **social benefits** like unemployment, pensions, and insurance.
- Greater **control over working conditions**, schedules, and client choices.
- Legal status promotes **autonomy, legitimacy, and empowerment**.
- Regulation ensures **safer workplaces** and helps prevent trafficking or coercion.

Going Foward

Seattle:

- Would interview more businesses on Aurora and schools on their perception of sex workers. I would also try and push the police to respond to messages of requesting interviews.
- I would look more into specific court cases involving sex workers and buyers, to see how that legal process goes
- Look harder for services available for sex workers to get health services or reach out for help on other things the the PIC in Amsterdam

Amsterdam:

- Go to the PIC more often to get more intel on behind the scenes of sex workers.
- Look more into the legal process of getting licenses and how those without "sexual citizenship," can be recognized.
- Observe the RLD more at nighttime when it gets dark (10pm or after).



THANK YOU!!

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