

# **Dutch Policy on Prostitution**

*Questions and Answers 2012*

<b>1</b>	<b>Is prostitution legal in the Netherlands?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>What are the implications of article 273f of the Criminal Code?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>What penalties are imposed?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>What does the policy involve?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Why was the ban on brothels lifted in 2000?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>How do sex workers benefit?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>How do inspections work?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Can local authorities refuse to allow brothels?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Are the police allowed to keep a register of sex workers?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>What is the policy on health care?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>What forms does prostitution take?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>How many prostitutes are there in the Netherlands and what countries do they come from?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>How does lifting the ban on brothels affect labour relations?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>How does lifting the ban on brothels affect sex workers' rights to social security?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>What arrangements are made for the collection of tax and social insurance contributions?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>How does the policy help to combat human trafficking?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Under what conditions may foreign nationals legally engage in prostitution in the Netherlands?</b>	<b>15</b>

<b>18</b>	<b>Is help available for victims of human trafficking?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>What interest groups exist to assist prostitutes?</b>	<b>16</b>

## **Introduction**

In 2000, the Netherlands lifted the ban on brothels. This means that running one is no longer a criminal offence. The ban was lifted for two reasons: first, to improve the sector as a whole and the position of sex workers by introducing licences, and second, to tackle abuses by taking firmer action against businesses operating without licences.

An important aim of the policy is to put an end to the exploitation of people for the purposes of prostitution: human trafficking. Trafficking was already illegal before the ban on brothels was lifted, and it was the work of the police and the Public Prosecution Service to combat it. There were protocols, policy plans and special guidelines in place to tackle trafficking in women associated with prostitution.

While policy on prostitution is the responsibility the Ministry of Security and Justice, it also falls under the remit of the Ministries of the Interior & Kingdom Relations, Social Affairs & Employment, Education, Culture & Science, Health, Welfare & Sport, and Foreign Affairs.

A bill to regulate prostitution and prevent abuses in the sex industry is currently being debated in the Senate. It is hoped that the bill, which is expected to enter into force in early 2013, will strengthen efforts to crack down on trafficking in persons as well as properly regulate the sex industry.

## **1 Is prostitution legal in the Netherlands?**

Prostitution as such has never been a criminal offence in the Netherlands, provided it was voluntary and that no minors were involved. Brothels, however, were illegal until 1 October 2000, when articles 250bis and 432 were removed from the Criminal Code and the ban on brothels and pimping lifted. It is now legal to run a business where men or women over the age of consent are voluntarily employed as sex workers. The person running the business must satisfy certain conditions and obtain a licence from the local authorities (if required). Moreover, the bill concerning the regulation of prostitution and prevention of abuses in the sex industry ('the new bill') makes licences compulsory, so as to standardise policy across different municipalities. Sex clubs, brothels and escort services may therefore operate as legal businesses. The Netherlands is one of the first countries in the world to recognise voluntary adult prostitution as a normal occupation.

## **2 What are the implications of article 273f of the Criminal Code?**

Article 273f makes it an offence to exploit another person for the purpose of prostitution and outlaws other forms of sexual exploitation. It also prohibits labour exploitation and slavery, and such practices as removing a person's organs by means of deception or force.

## **3 What penalties are imposed?**

Anyone who

- forces another person to engage in prostitution
- induces a minor to engage in prostitution
- recruits, takes away or abducts a person to engage in prostitution in another country (pursuant to the 1933 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age)
- profits from prostitution involving a minor or forced prostitution
- forces another person to surrender the proceeds of prostitution

is liable to a custodial sentence of up to eight years.

In the event of aggravating circumstances (the victim is under the age of sixteen or if two persons committed the offence acting in concert) the sentence may be raised to a maximum of twelve years. If the offence involves serious physical injury or danger to life, the penalty

may be raised to a maximum of 15 years and to a maximum of 18 years for loss of life.

## **4 What does the policy involve?**

Although the ban on brothels was lifted in 2000, no legislation governing prostitution was introduced at that time. It is hoped that the new bill will result in the introduction of such legislation. It has been left to local authorities to formulate and implement policies tailored to the circumstances prevailing in their area. Hence, local authorities lay down the rules for brothels operating within their jurisdiction. They are also responsible for issuing licences (which will be compulsory if the bill is passed in its entirety). Brothels must be licensed and must therefore satisfy the conditions. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities has published guidelines for the regulation of brothels, sex shops, streetwalkers etc.

Policy on the establishment of brothels enables local authorities to exert influence on their location, ensuring that they do not disturb or intrude on the life of a neighbourhood. Their location must conform to zoning and urban renewal plans and to local by-laws on the living and working environment.

Regulations on premises specify the minimum size of working areas and govern safety, fire precautions and hygiene. For instance, every working area must be equipped with a panic button, and hot and cold running water. Condoms must be provided.

Regulations on the operation of brothels govern the position and status of sex workers, protecting their physical and mental integrity and prohibiting forced prostitution, the employment of minors or people without a valid residence permit. They also include measures to prevent excessive nuisance in neighbourhoods where brothels are located.

## **5 Why was the ban on brothels lifted in 2000?**

Brothels were banned in the Netherlands in 1911 to protect prostitutes from exploitation. However, the ban has not been enforced for the past 50 years. Action was only taken against brothels and sex clubs if they engaged in criminal activities or disturbed public order.

To end abuses in the sex industry, the Netherlands decided to change the law to reflect everyday reality. It is now legal to employ men and women who are over the age of consent, and do the work voluntarily, but stricter measures have been introduced under criminal law

to prevent exploitation. The legalisation of brothels enables the government to exercise more control over the sex industry, identify abuses at an earlier stage and strictly enforce regulations. The police conduct frequent controls of brothels and are thus in a position to pick up signs of human trafficking (although where licences are not required, such information remains difficult to obtain). This approach is in the interests of sex workers themselves, and it facilitates action against sexual violence and abuse and human trafficking. If the bill is passed, the compulsory licences and mandatory registration will enable the municipalities, in their capacity as supervisor, to strengthen monitoring. Under the new bill, municipalities will no longer be permitted to delegate their supervisory duties to the police.

By lifting the ban on brothels, the government aims to:

- control and regulate the employment of sex workers through a municipal licensing system
- protect the position of sex workers
- protect people from being coerced into prostitution
- protect minors against sexual abuse
- reduce prostitution by foreign nationals residing illegally in the Netherlands
- sever the links between prostitution and crime.

## **6 How do sex workers benefit?**

The legalisation of brothels has several advantages for sex workers. It means that local authorities can publish by-laws governing safety, hygiene and working conditions in brothels. Brothels may be forbidden to force sex workers to consume alcoholic drinks with clients, or engage in unsafe sex or certain sexual acts. They may also be compelled to allow health services or interest groups unrestricted access to their premises.

Prostitution is now considered a legitimate occupation. So sex workers now have the same rights and obligations as other professionals. The owners of brothels operated in a grey area for many years, in that the relevant legislation was not enforced. As a result, the working relationship between sex workers and their employers differs from that in other sectors and now has to be formalised. Most brothel owners are unwilling to enter into employment contracts. The rationale is that they provide support services to self-employed sex workers, and are therefore not obliged to pay income tax or social insurance contributions. The authorities can verify the nature of the working relationship and take action against anyone operating under false pretences.

The second study on the effect of lifting the ban, in 2007, showed that there is ongoing debate on the employment status of people working in the sex industry. The Tax and Customs Administration and the benefit agencies need to know whether sex workers are categorised as employees or self-employed. Sex workers generally prefer to work independently and do not see themselves as employees. The people for whom they work also prefer to see them as self-employed. Nonetheless, given the nature of the power relationship between the former and the latter, sex workers can be considered to be in employment for the purposes of the relevant legislation.

The situation regarding the rights of sex workers is much clearer, as employers in the sex industry now have to comply with labour laws and tax and social insurance obligations, just like in any other sector. The government publishes booklets for sex workers and their employers, containing information on social insurance and related matters. They examine the comparative advantages of employment and self-employment, and their respective rights and obligations.

Studies on the impact of the lifting of the ban were conducted in 2002 and 2007. They showed that the situation in the sex industry has improved since 2000, but that there are still serious abuses such as trafficking in women, prostitution involving girls under the age of consent and forced prostitution. Rehabilitating a sector that had been operating illegally for almost a century requires more than new laws or new policy. Sex workers and their employers need clear information about their rights and obligations, and employment relations, while the status of sex workers under current policy must be improved. The outcome of the studies will be useful in this process. It is also hoped that the new bill will improve the situation. If it is passed, sex industry employers will be required to apply for a licence in the municipality in which they operate, and sex workers will be required to register. The bill gives employers greater responsibility for combating abuses and protecting and strengthening the position of the people who work for them. Various conditions attached to the licences concern measures to protect health, safety and right to self-determination.

Clients who use unregistered prostitutes will be liable to prosecution as will unregistered prostitutes or prostitutes working in unlicensed premises.

## **7 How do inspections work?**

Monitoring brothels to ensure that they satisfy the conditions for a licence is an administrative matter. It is up to the local authorities to decide who is responsible for doing so. In practice, it has usually been the police. Local enforcement policy is coordinated by the mayor, the public prosecutor and the chief of police. Agreements reached between them may be set down in enforcement instructions. The new bill proposes that municipalities be jointly responsible with the police for enforcing compliance with their licencing policy; they will no longer be allowed to delegate this responsibility entirely to the police. This will free up police capacity for investigating serious abuses and human trafficking.

Brothels that fail to observe the regulations are liable to administrative sanctions such as a penalty payment, withdrawal of their licence and closure. They can also be prosecuted for the offences covered by article 273f of the Criminal Code in the event of prohibited forms of prostitution or sexual services (see 2).

Compulsory licences for all businesses where men or women are employed as sex workers will make it easier for the municipalities and police to take action under either administrative or criminal law. The bill will make it an offence to operate such a business unless it has been issued with a licence. If it does not have one, the person running the business will have committed an offence under article 1 of the Economic Offences Act. Municipalities themselves will determine, through licensing, which forms of prostitution and which kinds of businesses are permitted within their boundaries. They will also determine how many businesses can be located there, and where. Municipalities can also choose to have no such businesses at all, if they feel that is necessary for the protection of public order, the environment in which people live, and the health of sex workers and their clients. This is known as the 'zero option' (*nuloptie*). In that case, too, the municipality will continue to be responsible for enforcement and supervision.

## **8 Can local authorities refuse to allow brothels?**

Through their licensing policies, local authorities can regulate the establishment and location of brothels. They may, for instance, set a limit on the number of brothels or restrict them to certain neighbourhoods. They may also refuse or withdraw a licence for certain forms of prostitution, such as window soliciting, if:

- the owner of a brothel is unable to produce a certificate of good conduct issued by the local authorities

- the situation and conditions set out in section 3 of the Public Administration (Probity Screening) Act apply
- the intended location conflicts with zoning plans
- the brothel employs a minor or an illegal resident or any person under coercion
- it is in the interest of public order
- it makes the area less desirable to live or work in.

Under current policy, permission to run a brothel may not be refused on ethical grounds. Following an administrative court judgment, refusal is only possible if there are objections from a spatial planning point of view. While this will not change under the new bill, municipalities will be given the choice to refuse brothels, even if there are no such objections. If the bill is passed, municipalities choosing the zero option may refuse all businesses employing men or women as sex workers within their boundaries. Municipalities will also be able to set a maximum on the number of licences issued to certain businesses in the sex industry.

There are conditions attached to the zero option. First, it applies only to brothels, thus excluding other sex businesses and sex workers operating from home but not as a business. The zero option is also intended to protect public order, the environment in which people live, and the safety and health of sex workers and their clients.

## **9 Are the police allowed to keep a register of sex workers?**

No. This would contravene various laws protecting personal privacy. However, the police may keep a temporary register for a specific law enforcement purpose, for example to investigate human trafficking. They are obliged to report this to the Data Protection Board.

The new bill proposes taking this further. If it is passed in its current form, a national register of escort services will be set up. In addition to this, sex workers will be required to register with their local authority, who will enter them in a national computerised system that will be accessible only to the competent authorities. Under current legislation – and in the new bill – only self-employed sex workers and businesses are required to register with the Tax and Customs Administration and the Chamber of Commerce. As a result, a large proportion will remain invisible to enforcement bodies (e.g. the police) and social work agencies. Mandatory registration is intended to remedy this situation, providing a better overview.

## **10 What is the policy on health care?**

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that sex workers have easy access to health care, with readily available services and no sanctions, but health and working conditions are primarily the responsibility of the sex workers themselves and their employers. The local authorities' job is to ensure that employers fulfil their obligations. For instance, they can set conditions for granting licences and take steps to ensure that those conditions are met.

Employers' responsibilities include pursuing a safe sex policy, giving their workers the opportunity to benefit from information activities, and encouraging them to have regular medical checkups for sexually transmissible infections (see question 19). General practitioners and specialists have been given special guidelines on STI screening among sex workers.

Medical checkups are not compulsory. Obligatory checkups reinforce the idea that sex workers transmit infections. Moreover, clients use medical checkups as an excuse to ask for unsafe sex. As a rule, sex workers are asked to have medical checkups four times a year. The majority consider them useful precautions and are willing to comply. Clinics in the cities offer free and anonymous checkups. Safe sex and good information are of paramount importance in protecting sex workers and their clients against transmissible infections.

One objective of the bill is to ensure that sex workers receive good health care. All businesses where men or women are employed as sex workers will need to have a licence from the municipality in which they are located. Before a licence can be issued, businesses will need to show they have met certain conditions, e.g. have taken measures to protect health (see question 6).

## **11 What forms does prostitution take?**

There are different kinds of prostitution. The majority of prostitutes work in sex clubs or red-light windows, but prostitution is increasingly taking place in hotels and bars, or through escort services and massage parlours. Under current legislation, such practices are illegal unless a licence has been issued to the establishment in question.

Many local authorities prohibit streetwalking to prevent nuisance and safeguard public order.

Some have designated official zones where streetwalkers may solicit at specified times. Various larger zones have however been closed down. Each zone has a car park where sex workers and clients can make contact. There is also a lounge where they can shower and rest. They can obtain coffee and condoms and speak to a counsellor if they wish. The introduction of these zones has significantly increased the safety of streetwalkers and reduced or even eradicated nuisance in residential areas. Window soliciting occurs in most large towns and cities.

According to a survey conducted in 2000, prostitution took the following forms:

Form	Percentage
Window soliciting	20
Streetwalkers	5
Brothels and sex clubs	45
Escort services	15
Service at home	5
Other*	10
Total	100

\* Hotels, bars, massage parlours etc.

The number of people working in the sex industry and the forms prostitution takes have changed since the lifting of the ban, partly because of the current differences in local policy and the emergence of the internet. In addition to the more 'traditional' forms of prostitution, the internet is now used for advertising and for web-cam sex. Another phenomenon is the 'loverboy', who operates by engaging in a relationship with a vulnerable teenage girl, isolating her from those around her and, once she is completely under his control, forcing her to work as a prostitute. While this is not a new phenomenon, it is presented as such. Loverboys are regarded as human traffickers, and are treated as such (see question 16).

## **12 How many prostitutes are there in the Netherlands and what countries do they come from?**

When the ban was lifted, there were estimated to be 25,000 prostitutes in the country, with 12,500 working at any one time at a total of 6,000 locations. Many were migrants. In the 1970s the majority of foreign prostitutes were from Thailand and the Philippines, in the

1980s from Latin America and the Caribbean. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s, many came from Central and Eastern Europe. In 1999 no more than one third were Dutch nationals, the remainder representing 44 nationalities. The majority were from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland. No figures were available on illegal residents.

At the time, an estimated five per cent of prostitutes were male and five per cent transsexual, the majority being migrants. Ten per cent of all prostitutes were drug addicts, the majority being Dutch nationals.

No recent estimates are available of the number of prostitutes in the Netherlands. The number of illegal prostitutes is assumed to have declined over the past few years, as a result of frequent inspections of licensed brothels by the police and tax authorities. The number of prostitutes from China and West Africa also appears to be on the rise.

### **13 How does lifting the ban on brothels affect labour relations?**

The lifting of the ban on brothels means that private law, which includes labour law, applies to relations between sex workers and their employers. The most important points are that individuals should be able to decide whether they wish to work in the sex industry and, if so, how, and that they themselves can also choose to terminate the business relationship.

The bill submitted to the House of Representatives in November 2009 aims to make registration mandatory for all sex workers. When they register, they will receive verbal and written information on their rights, the risks associated with their work and ways to leave the profession. They will also be provided with contact details for social work services and the police.

The Working Conditions Act and most other legislation that applies to the business sector in general applies to the sex industry as well. The Labour Inspectorate has published a booklet containing information on legislation governing safety, health and welfare. The booklet is intended for sex workers and their employers, and for safety, health and welfare services.

De Rode Draad, a national reference centre and interest group for current and former prostitutes, campaigns for their rights and for recognition of sex work as a profession. It collaborates with the Trade Union Confederation FNV.

## **14 How does lifting the ban on brothels affect sex workers' rights to social security?**

Sex workers who work for an employer and are obliged to stop working for reasons beyond their control are eligible for unemployment benefit. Like any other unemployed person, they must be available for work and take any jobs that are generally considered acceptable. Obviously no-one can be obliged to take a job in the sex industry, nor do employment offices offer such jobs.

Sex workers who choose to stop working, whether for an employer or as a self-employed professional, are not eligible for unemployment benefit, because they have become unemployed voluntarily. Instead, they are entitled to social assistance. They may register as jobseekers.

Sex workers who work for an employer are eligible for invalidity benefit. They are entitled to benefits only if they are no longer able to do their own or any other generally acceptable work.

These rules apply to employees in all sectors.

## **15 What arrangements are made for the collection of tax and social insurance contributions?**

Sex workers and their employers are required to pay tax. The Tax and Customs Administration applies a target group approach which is uniform throughout the country. Both parties are responsible for paying tax, depending on the nature of their working relationship. Employers are obliged to contribute towards employee insurance schemes, with payments being made to the Tax Administration as of 1 January 2006.

On 1 January 2009, regulations came into effect setting out the conditions under which people who work in the sex industry are liable for tax and social security contributions. This has clarified labour relations in the industry. The main aim is to make sex workers more independent. To this end, the regulations set out a number of crucial conditions relating to their position and management of the business. If they are not complied with, or if businesses choose not to apply the conditions, the Tax Administration will treat the sex

worker as an employee for tax purposes. This will have implications for taxation, contributions and social security. The Tax and Customs Administration has distributed an information pack to the owners of businesses and to sex workers, and will monitor compliance with these conditions.

## **16 How does the policy help to combat human trafficking?**

Dutch policy aims primarily to regulate the industry. An important spin-off of the policy is that it prevents human trafficking, which is characterised by exploitation, coercion and violence. The lifting of the ban on brothels makes prostitution a legitimate occupation and gives sex workers the same rights and protection as other professionals. The labour laws offer the most effective protection against exploitation, violence and coercion. Similarly, Dutch policy on sexual violence is based on the conviction that strengthening the position of women is the best way to prevent sexual violence. Moreover, abuses are easier to detect when sex workers operate publicly and legally rather than in a clandestine subculture.

The introduction of a municipal licensing system enables the police and other law enforcement agencies to conduct inspections of brothels, subject to the mayor's consent. Through regular inspections to ensure that brothels conform to the licensing conditions, the police are in a position to pick up signs of human trafficking. They obtain invaluable information that can be used immediately to trace and prosecute offenders in both the regulated and unregulated sectors.

The maximum penalty for human trafficking was increased to 8 years on 1 July 2009, to reflect the seriousness of the crime. If the offences were committed by two or more persons in association, or if the victim was under 16, the maximum penalty is 12 years. If the victim is suffered grievous bodily harm this rises to 15 years; if the victim died as a result of the crime, the maximum penalty is 18 years.

A special phone line, *Meld Misdaad Anoniem*, has been opened so that members of the public can anonymously report suspicious activities.

Article 273f of the Criminal Code, which prohibits human trafficking, is strictly enforced. The law enforcement authorities in the Netherlands give priority to combating the traffic in persons.

The Netherlands supports projects both at home and abroad aimed at preventing human trafficking. It is also tackling the problem in partnership with other members of the European Union. The European Union conducts information campaigns in countries in which victims are recruited, and in 2003 it set up an experts group on the subject. Europol supports operational and research projects in the member states, and conducts studies to improve policing methods.

In 2000 the Netherlands commissioned an independent national rapporteur – one of the few positions of its kind in the European Union – to publish an annual report on human trafficking and make recommendations to the Dutch government. In early 2008 the then Justice Minister and State Secretary set up the Task Force on Human Trafficking. One of the objectives of the Task Force, which is chaired by the Chief Public Prosecutor at Amsterdam district court, is to identify and remove obstacles to tackling human trafficking.

One of the central pillars of the plan to tackle trafficking in persons is the bill to regulate prostitution and prevent abuses in the sex industry. The aim of the proposed changes in policy (compulsory licences for businesses employing men or women as sex workers; national register for escort services; mandatory registration of sex workers; making it an offence to frequent non-registered prostitutes or unlicensed businesses; the ‘zero option’ for municipalities, and increased supervision and enforcement) is to tighten control of prostitution and its ever-changing, ever-increasing forms, e.g. through the internet and escort services, and to improve the position of sex workers. The measures also present administrative barriers, at local level, to human trafficking, under-age prostitution and forced prostitution.

## **17 Under what conditions may foreign nationals legally engage in prostitution in the Netherlands?**

Nationals of countries outside the European Union and the European Economic Area who do not have a valid residence permit are not allowed to work in the Netherlands. By the same token, they are not allowed to engage in prostitution. This group includes visitors who are in the Netherlands on a tourist visa or who do not require a visa for a stay not exceeding three months.

Nationals of countries that have signed an association agreement with the European Union, may establish themselves as self-employed workers, providing they satisfy the conditions for

doing so (private capital, business plan, commercial skills) and possess a residence permit that allows them to work for themselves. They may not work for an employer.

Nationals of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom may work in the sex industry in the Netherlands, either for themselves or for an employer. Nationals of the countries that joined the European Union in 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) may establish themselves as self-employed sex workers in the Netherlands. However, under a transitional arrangement that applies until at least 31 December 2011 (but not beyond 31 December 2013), they are not permitted to work for an employer in the Netherlands.

Strict measures are taken against prostitutes operating in the Netherlands without a valid residence permit and to unmask anyone working under false pretences. Any person who is in the Netherlands illegally is asked to leave or may be deported under the provisions of the Aliens Act.

## **18 Is help available for victims of human trafficking?**

Anyone who is in the Netherlands illegally and is a victim of human trafficking, and who files a criminal complaint of trafficking or otherwise assists the criminal justice process, is granted a temporary residence permit pending the outcome of legal proceedings. This arrangement offers assistance and protection to victims and witnesses of human trafficking. If the proceedings result in a conviction, they may be eligible for a residence permit for continued residence on humanitarian grounds. They may also be eligible for such a permit in case of acquittal, provided they have resided legally in the Netherlands for at least three years. If the proceedings are still ongoing after three years, victims may apply for a residence permit for continued residence on humanitarian grounds.

Victims are given three months to decide whether they wish to file a criminal complaint. They are allowed to stay in the Netherlands legally during this period and may use all public facilities and services, such as counselling, medical care, and financial and legal services.

## **19 What interest groups exist to assist prostitutes?**

Many agencies and organisations are working to improve conditions for prostitutes. The following are some examples.

*A. de Graaf Foundation*, established in 1961 and dissolved in 1999, specialised in issues relating to prostitution. It advised on policy, encouraged debate, conducted research and carried out projects on assignment. It also managed an information and documentation centre.

*Stichting Aids Fonds–Soa Aids Nederland* coordinates information campaigns on AIDS and sexually transmissible infections (STIs). These campaigns target specific categories of prostitutes, such as foreign nationals, drug users and transsexuals.

*De Rode Draad* is a national reference centre and interest group for current and former prostitutes. It campaigns for their rights and recognition of sex work as a profession. It collaborates with the Trade Union Confederation FNV: [www.rodedraad.nl](http://www.rodedraad.nl).

*CoMensha (Coordination Centre to combat human trafficking, formerly known as the Dutch Foundation against Trafficking in Women)* works to prevent and combat human trafficking and offers victims counselling and help. The centre functions as a national contact point for reporting, housing and registering victims of human trafficking: [www.mensenhandel.nl/cms/](http://www.mensenhandel.nl/cms/).

[www.prostitutie.nl/](http://www.prostitutie.nl/) is a *Soa Aids Nederland* portal for women working in the sex industry that provides information on STIs, safe sex and working conditions.

*Het Scharlaken Koord*, part of the *Stichting Tot Heil des Volks*, is a Christian civil society organisation that works to help prostitutes:

<http://www.totheildesvolks.nl/scharlaken-koord/home.html>

It also runs the 'Beware of loverboys' project:

[www.bewareofloverboys.nl/wij.htm](http://www.bewareofloverboys.nl/wij.htm)

*Pretty Woman* provides girls and young women aged 12 to 22 with information, individual assistance and group assistance. Girls (and boys) can ask questions about growing up, sexuality, high-risk relationships (including pimp boyfriends) and abusive relationships:

[www.stichtingstade.nl/Pretty-Woman-97.html](http://www.stichtingstade.nl/Pretty-Woman-97.html)

*This is a publication of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

The Ministries of Social Affairs & Employment (SZW), Education, Culture & Science (OCW) and Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) have set up a joint website providing information about sex workers' rights and duties, social security, financial security and municipal policy:

[www.prostitutiegoedgeregeld.nl](http://www.prostitutiegoedgeregeld.nl)

Owners of businesses where men or women are employed as sex workers are represented by the *Vereniging Exploitanten Relaxbedrijven* ([www.v-e-r.nl/](http://www.v-e-r.nl/)), the *Excellentgroep* and the *Stichting Overleg Raambordelen*.

*BlinN (Bonded Labour in the Netherlands)* is a joint initiative of *Humanitas* and *Oxfam Novib* and works to improve the position of victims of human trafficking: [www.blinn.nl](http://www.blinn.nl).