

**THE REPORT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY PROSTITUTION FACT FINDING TRIP TO SWEDEN  
(22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2019)**

**COMPILED BY THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CROSS PARTY GROUP FOR COMMERCIAL SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION**

## **The Purpose of the Visit**

The parliamentary trip was organised and sponsored by UK Feminista<sup>ii</sup>. The purpose of the visit was to establish what impact Sweden's Sex Purchase Act (which criminalises paying for sex but decriminalises victims who sell sex) has had on reducing the demand that drives sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. The delegates were also seeking to establish how similar 'demand reduction' legislation could be effectively implemented in Scotland.

The purpose of this report is to disseminate the information gained to parliamentarians, government policy makers, CPG members, NGOs and the wider public.

## **Participants**

The following individuals are taking part in the fact-finding mission:

- Ash Denham, MSP for Edinburgh Eastern and Minister for Community Safety
- Detective Chief Inspector Rory Hamilton, Police Scotland
- Jeremy Balfour, MSP for Lothian
- Lynsay Ross, Scottish Government
- Paddy Makin, Scottish Government
- Eilidh Dickson, Engender
- Dr. Jacqui Stoye, Secretariat of the Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation

The parliamentary party travelled to Stockholm and met with the following Swedish officials and organisations at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health and Social Affairs:

- Per-Anders Sunesson: Ambassador at Large for Combating Trafficking in Persons
- Detective Superintendent Kajsa Wahlberg: National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings
- Detective Inspector Simon Haggström: Expert, National Operations Department, Swedish Police Authority
- Anna och Josefine, Talita: Talita is a non-profit organisation offering help and support to women who have been exploited in prostitution, pornography or human trafficking for sexual purposes.
- Marie Lind Thomsen, Senior Prosecutor, Swedish Prosecution Authority
- Eva Wintzell, Senior Prosecutor, Swedish Prosecution Authority

- Sofie Lidbeck and Maria Dorrian, Mikamottagningen: Mikamottagningen is a municipal organisation that offers help to persons who have experience of sexual exploitation.
- Anna Skarhed: Former Chancellor of Justice (2009-2018) responsible for the evaluation the Sex Purchase Act in 2010 on behalf of the Swedish Government.

## Introduction

I would like to begin by setting the scene and the context of our visit. Per-Anders Sunesson, the Ambassador at Large for Trafficking was our host for the two days. As you can see from the list above, we met with people who are at the head of their professions, and who are all key players in the fight against the exploitation of the sex trade. Whilst our meetings were in government offices, nonetheless, our presenters were very informal, friendly and eager to impart their knowledge. We talked across tables in small rooms and felt at home to ask questions and comment as issues arose. In writing up the report, I have chosen to try and retain some of that anecdotal feel and capture the total enthusiasm that everyone had for this law.

### **Detective Superintendent Kajsa Wahlberg, the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings**

Our first presentation was from DS Kajsa Wahlberg, the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings. Sweden was the first country in the EU to appoint such a role and her responsibility is to report the state of trafficking to the Swedish Government, to produce annual reports and to implement training for the Police.

## Background

DS Wahlberg related the background to the Sex Purchase Act;

She said,

‘It is unreasonable to criminalise the seller, who in most cases is the weaker party, and who is exploited by the buyer who wants to satisfy their own sexual desires. In Sweden, prostitution is perceived as violence against women and a threat to gender equality. The women are supported to exit. The cornerstone is to focus on demand and to criminalise the buyers.’

DS Wahlberg explained that Sweden’s zero tolerance policy to procuring applies equally to pimping. Indeed, pimping is treated similarly, with the same punishment margin given for both, which is 2 to 10 years. Sweden recognises that pimping brings in a lot of money for criminal gangs and so the trafficking reports also include pimping activities. In Sweden women are mostly trafficked for sex and men for begging, labour and farming.

## Statistics

DS Wahlberg gave us some recent Swedish data on trafficking in human beings. In 2018, 92 women were rescued, which was more than in 2017 when the number was 82. However, DS Wahlberg said that this was because they were getting better at catching the traffickers, rather than there being an increase in the numbers of women trafficked. To illustrate this, she said there were 15 convictions in 2018, compared to 5 in 2017. (For comparison, I have looked up the convictions in the UK. In Scotland the government figures show there were no

convictions for human trafficking for 2015-16, or 2016-17. In England there were only 25 successful convictions for all forms of human trafficking between April 2015 and March 2017. (The population of Sweden is 10.2 million people). Later, in our presentations, the former Chancellor of Justice, Anna Skarhed, gave us the following facts on the global report on human trafficking (inserted here for relevance):

- One third of the victims are children and two thirds of children are girls
- The majority of adults are female and are used for sexual exploitation
- In Europe 150, 000 victims are forced into prostitution
- In Sweden the trafficked girls are foreigners
- Human trafficking is a lucrative business that funds other types of crime

Both DS Wahlberg and former Chancellor Skarhed gave us comparative statistics on Germany. In Sweden there are about 2000 women in prostitution; in Germany the numbers are about 400,000. Whilst Germany is a bigger country, nonetheless, it is estimated that if Sweden had gone down the same route as Germany, where prostitution is legalised, their numbers would have been about 40,000. Interestingly, we were told that Sweden gets a lot of questions from Germany. Apparently, despite legalisation, the German government are concerned about prostitution as it has generated so many criminal gangs operating in the country.

We were told the following facts about the situation in Germany:

- There is a huge amount of violence; 70 women were murdered in 2016.
- There are 1.2 million purchases of sex every 24 hours
- 98% of the women are foreigners
- The state makes about 15 billion euros from the brothels.

## **Implementation of the Law**

DS Wahlberg impressed upon us the critical importance of implementation by saying,

'A controversial law does not implement itself! You need to have political vision. Prostitution brings in a lot of violence, trafficking, drugs and money laundering -these have now gone!'

## **The Work of the Police in Implementing the Law**

**Detective Inspector Simon Häggström, Expert, National Operations Department Swedish Police Authority**

DI Häggström has been implementing the Sex Purchase Act for 11 years, originally in Stockholm, but he now works for the National Operation Trafficking Unit and travels all around the country. He said,

'A lot of countries think you should go for traffickers but not those in voluntary prostitution, but we say that is impossible. Who is a victim?' He showed us photos of website advertisements for escorts and continued, 'Look at the photos, they all claim the same thing, 'independent escort, available 24/7.'

He related how he had visited Romania to see for himself the place from where so many young women are trafficked and he showed us photos of the run-down estates, describing them as utterly bleak.

He told us,

'The pro sex lobby have a loud voice, but they represent a tiny minority. Organised crime, on the other hand, is making a fortune out of men paying on a regular basis for sex. Although the law is gender neutral, nonetheless, in 20 years there has not been a single case of a woman buying sex. It's a male problem, and we need to address that'.

At first, DI Häggström told us that he had been sceptical of the Sex Purchase Law, but he wasn't anymore. He described how they go about catching the buyers. They begin by surfing the websites (he was adamant that prostitution can't go 'underground' because buyers and sellers can always find each other and therefore so can the police!). The police will ring the number from the website and send a police officer to the door posing as a buyer to get a door code.<sup>iii</sup> The officer will then retreat saying, 'I can't go through with this after all,' which apparently often happens, and the women and pimps are used to this. Finally, the police sit and wait for a real buyer to come along and make an arrest.

In Sweden, even the attempt to buy sex is illegal, so the police don't have to wait for a buyer to go through with the act of sex before an arrest can be made. If women police officers are propositioned on the street (they always work in plain clothes) they can arrest a man. If a man buys a woman to give as a gift to another man, both men can be arrested and so can the taxi driver who ferries the women around. If a woman is paid in kind with drugs or rent it also counts. If a person owns an apartment and they know the woman is selling sex, they can be prosecuted but the woman is not thrown out.

Again, DI Häggström was anxious to refute another myth about the law, which is that violence towards the women increases when the Sex Purchase Act is applied. There is absolutely no evidence of that, in fact, the opposite is the case. Whilst prostitution is intrinsically violent, most of the women now say that it is safer. Firstly, if a man is violent, they can ring the police without worrying if they might be arrested. But what is even more intriguing, is that they feel so much safer now, because it is the buyers who are afraid. The buyers know that the law is on the woman's side and this makes a difference to their behaviour, even in the transaction itself.

DI Häggström told us that when the police meet a woman this is the list of things they will *not* do:

'Not rape her, not take her money, not arrest her; rather they try to build trust first'.

They always have a social worker with them; the police do the initial interview and then the social worker comes in. This wasn't the case in the beginning, but they have learned from experience how helpful this is. Often the social worker keeps going back, and eventually, women will admit that they are being forced. DI Häggström says that his work is about planting seeds, he'll give women his card and they will sometimes ring him 2 years later!

It cannot be emphasised enough from listening to DI Häggström's presentation that the attitude of the police in Sweden towards the women is one of compassion and sensitivity. They are perceived as victims of crime, not perpetrators, and they are treated with respect and dignity and offered support at every stage of police engagement. I discovered on my return to the UK that DI Häggström has written a book, *Shadow's law: the true story of a Swedish detective inspector fighting prostitution*,<sup>iv</sup> which may yield even greater insights into his vital work and the lived experience of implementing this law.

## **The Work of the Prosecution Service in Implementing the Law**

**Marie Lind Thomsen and Eva Wintzell, Senior Prosecutors, Swedish Prosecution Authority**

Marie Lind Thomsen has been working in the field of human trafficking since 2005, and she and Eva Wintzell are both employed in the National Unit Against Organised Crime. This Unit covers the whole country and involves cross border and international judicial co-operation. It has three offices based in Stockholm, Gothenberg, and Malmo.

Critically, the role of prosecutor in Sweden is different from that in the UK; the Prosecution Service is involved in a case from the beginning, right from when the police first have a suspect. They are completely independent from the police but both services work together quite intricately. So, this means there is help from the start with permits for evidence gathering, such as wiretapping, house searches and getting bank records. The prosecutor decides on an indictment and is an advocate for the police case. Usually, it's the same person all the way through and only changes to the Prosecutor General when it goes to the Supreme Court. Marie Lind Thomsen said that wiretapping is less effective these days because people don't speak on their phones like they used to, again this follows a general cultural change in the popularity of texting. Unfortunately, the victim's testimony is still the best evidence. It continues to be a huge challenge trying to persuade a traumatised woman to speak against her traffickers, but in Sweden they can take time over surveillance, wiretapping and checking bank accounts, so that they can amass a lot of other evidence to make a strong case against the pimps.

## **Punishments for Purchasing Sexual Services**

If buyers admit buying sex, or making an attempt to buy sex, they receive a fine which is proportional to the person's income. If they deny the offence, they must go to court. This is rare (for obvious reasons!). If a buyer gets a fine, it stays on their record for 5 years. In the penal code they can be imprisoned for repeat offences, although this has not yet been used. One man has been arrested 12 times and it was discussed by the presenters as to whether he should have received a prison sentence for repeat offending. The ensuing consensus was that he probably should have.

Both Marie Lind Thomsen and DI Häggström told us about a case, where a buyer had been successfully charged with rape. Michaela<sup>v</sup> was a young Romanian woman, who had previously been married with a son in school. After her husband left her, she met a married man, who promised her a wonderful future with him in Sweden. Sadly, she was a victim of 'Lover boy syndrome'. They travelled to Sweden, where he became her pimp and prostituted her. He had a sumptuous apartment, but she lived in poor conditions. A John had bought her and had written a review of her performance on a punter website as 'suspected trafficking nothing to recommend.' He also took a video of them having sex on his mobile phone. The police caught him and charged him, but when he was arrested, he denied having sex with Michaela. However, because he had commented on the site that he thought she was trafficked, and because there was also proof on his phone that he'd had sex with her, the police and prosecution services were able to charge him for rape. He was found guilty, although his sentence was only 2 years.

## **The Cost of Implementation**

As I previously mentioned, DS Wahlberg had emphasised how important implementation is and the need to provide training for all those involved in the process. She broke down the costs for us (see below). I have put the rounded-up sterling equivalent in brackets for ease of comparison.

1999 8 million SEK [£661,000]

2004-6 30 million SEK [£2,500,000] For police training.

2008-11 40 million SEK [£3,333,000] For a government action plan to train judges and prosecutors.

2010 10 million SEK [£833,000] For the evaluation of the law.

## **Support for Women to Exit**

We met women from two organisations who support victims who have been trafficked or exploited in the sex trade. They described how they help women recover from their trauma and the devastating effects that this abuse has had on them.

### **Talita**

**Anna and Josefine founded Talita in 2004.**

They both worked to support prostituted women in the red-light district before the law came in, and at the time they were wary of it, but they say their fears were totally unfounded.

They described why they are now staunch advocates of the Sex Purchase Act:

- It reduces demand
- It reduces trafficking
- It has changed Swedish attitudes and has had a normative effect on people's thinking
- It supports gender equality which is not possible if prostitution exists
- They have spoken to many women and not one has criticized the law or the police, a prostituted Latvian woman summed it up for them, 'Good law, police help me'
- The police send the women to them

They told us that they have met hundreds of girls and not one of them went into prostitution because they wanted to. They only get a small amount of funding from the state, mostly it is from private donors and social media.

**Pia Ringkrans and Sofie Lidbeck run Mikamottagningen -a municipal organisation that offers help to persons who have experienced sexual exploitation**

Mika provides the following advocacy services:

- Support and counselling

- Listening
- Helping women to complete police reports
- Referring women to other services if required
- Supporting women to file appeals if they have been turned down for funds
- Referring women for medical tests

They would like a trauma therapist, as this is something they don't provide. They sent a message from Mika to every escort website on the internet (1,700) as a way of reaching out to women and got 117 answers, some of whom came to the reception centre.

## **The 2010 Evaluation**

### **Anna Skarhed Former Chancellor of Justice who evaluated the Sex Purchase Act in 2010 on behalf of the Swedish Government.**

The former Chancellor of Justice began her presentation by asserting the Swedish position, 'Victims are not criminals; my message to buyers -Yes! Sweden is abolitionist! Prostitution is a lucrative business that funds other types of crime. Our position is that prostitution is a barrier to gender equality, it seriously harms individuals and society and it is intrinsically violent'.

The former Chancellor of Justice told us that after eleven years of implementation, the Swedish government commissioned her to undertake a thorough evaluation of the Sex Purchase Act. In undertaking this in-depth appraisal all stakeholders were consulted, men and women in prostitution, police, prosecutors and social workers. The following conclusions demonstrated unequivocally that the law was fulfilling its promise:

- It was shown that the number of women in street prostitution was 50% less than was the case prior to 1999
- The numbers in Sweden were compared with the numbers in Norway and Denmark and in both countries the prostitution had increased and was three times higher than in Sweden (please note that Norway had only just legislated the Sex Purchase Act in 2009 and Sweden's law had been in existence for eleven years)
- People had argued that prostitution in Sweden had gone underground; this was simply not true
- Whilst, like prostitution everywhere, the buying of it had increased on the internet, as all types of shopping on the internet had increased; nonetheless, prostitution was still more extensive in Denmark and Norway as already stated
- The Swedish National Police found the law had deterred criminal gangs because organised prostitution is not lucrative in Sweden; the traffickers go where they can make money
- The law had created a normative effect in Swedish society, before 1999 most people said that the criminalising of sex was silly, but after two years there was a change of heart. Interestingly, this has also been found to be the case in France where 70% of French people now approve of their Sex Purchase Law

- It was found that there were no negative effects for sellers, contrary to the myths that abound, there was no evidence of more violence or stigma, indeed the women reported feeling safer
- The sellers can report the buyer to the police and therefore he is more careful

The former Chancellor of Justice told us that the police must actively seek buyers out in order to find them, but they have learnt how to do this and now they are really very good at it. Criminalisation on its own is not enough, but it sends an important message. She also said it is imperative to have a public discussion on the issues pre legislation. She informed us that in 2014 an EU commission found that voluntary prostitution is a myth and they advised other countries to follow Sweden<sup>vi</sup>. Some countries have followed them, and she thinks that the French legislation is better and clearer. The effects of prostitution on society had cost France 1.6 billion euros, which was a huge cost to the taxpayer. She said that people forget the financial impact of prostitution to society and that the demand for buying sex is costing the taxpayer far more than implementing the Swedish approach to the law. The opposite way, i.e. to legalise or decriminalise is not successful, for most women it is not a free choice.

## Visits from Other Countries

The former Chancellor of Justice, and indeed all our hosts, frequently mentioned that they are visited by many countries from across the world to find out more about their Sex Purchase Law. Delegates had recently visited from South Africa and the Ukraine and the former Chancellor of Justice had been to the Vatican four times.

## My Conclusions

My overall impression from the two days of presentations, discussions and listening intently to the key players in this battle was their passion and enthusiasm for The Sex Purchase Act, and their total commitment to implementing it. They were all on board, not one of them had any doubt about its effectiveness. The only discussions were about implementation and appropriate punishments, but never about the rightness of criminalising the buyers and perceiving the sellers as victims of exploitation and abuse. I believe that the fundamental reason for this was because it works!

In the beginning, they had tentatively come to it, some hoping it would work with fingers crossed and some, like Anna and Josefine from Talita and DI Häggström, with great apprehension, but now after twenty years of training, implementation and evaluation, they can see an amazing difference both in the numbers of women caught up in the sex trade and in the change of attitude of the Swedish people to sex buying *per se*. We have seen how effective this law is without filling the courts with hordes of otherwise law-abiding men and how a comparatively light punishment can be such a successful deterrent. Not only that, but the win win continues with the loss of gang culture because the traffickers have gone elsewhere and the money saved from the cost of prostitution to society in terms of health care, police and judiciary services, drug offences, homelessness, local authority care of children and so forth.<sup>vii</sup> Not only does the Sex Purchase Act prevent trafficking, grooming, abuse and exploitation of vulnerable people, it also deters organised criminality of all kinds, is comparatively cheap to implement and creates a huge saving to the public purse. I think it would be appropriate to finish with the former Chancellor of Justice's closing quotation from *Les Misérables*, written by Victor Hugo nearly 160 years ago.

'We say that slavery has vanished from European civilisation, but this is not true. Slavery still

exists, but now it applies only to women and its name is prostitution'.

ii UK Feminista is a not-for-profit organisation that supports people to take action for equality between women and men. UK Feminista provides the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade.

Twitter: @UK\_Feminista Website [www.ukfeminista.org.uk](http://www.ukfeminista.org.uk)

iii I'm not sure what this is, but I presume it is something that differentiates a potential buyer from, say, the postman.

iv DI Häggström's book details are as follows: *Shadow's law: the true story of a Swedish detective inspector fighting prostitution* Stockholm: Bullet Point Publishing. 2016. [Libris 19414812](#) . [ISBN 9789188153203](#)

v Not her real name.

vi The countries who have legislated the Swedish approach are listed in chronological order as follows: Sweden (1999), Norway (Jan 2009), Iceland (April 2009), Canada (2014), Northern Ireland (2015), The Republic of Ireland (Feb 2016), France (April 2016), Israel (2018), also Finland and South Korea have versions of it.

vii After the five murders in Ipswich, a successful, multi-disciplinary Swedish approach had been taken in Ipswich to support young women exiting from prostitution. The University of East Anglia (UEA) was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation and they assessed it as successful and cost effective. In fact, they said that every pound spent on the strategy saved the public purse two pounds, because of lower criminal justice and social support costs. <https://nordicmodelnow.org/2017/11/14/how-a-nordic-model-approach-to-tackling-prostitution-was-implemented-in-ipswich/>