

**PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
SWEDISH MODEL TO PREVENT  
AND COMBAT PROSTITUTION  
AND TRAFFICKING  
FOR PURPOSES OF SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION**

Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, PhD

# Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction ..... 3
  - 1.1. Framing the Problem ..... 4
  - 1.2. The Prostitution-Trafficking Link ..... 5
- 2. The “Building Blocks” of the Swedish Model ..... 7
  - 2.1. The Legal (restrictive) Component ..... 7
  - 2.2. The Social (supportive and restorative) Component ..... 9
  - 2.3. The Educational (transformative) Component ..... 13
- 3. Thinking Ahead ..... 15
- 4. References ..... 19

- Figure 1 : The “Building Blocks” of the Swedish Model, Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, 2018 ..... 7
- Figure 2 : Court Process; trafficking or procurement? Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, 2018 ..... 9
- Figure 3 : “Rooms” of Healing and Restoration, Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, 2021 ..... 10
- Figure 4 Personal views of the general public on buying sex,                      Figure 5 : Personal views of the  
 general public on selling sex ..... 14
- Figure 6 : Vulnerability in the Context of Prostitution and Trafficking. Adapted from Kaime-Atterhög,  
 1996 ..... 16
- Figure 7 : Redefining Support and Care, Adapted in 2021 from Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög 2018..... 18

- Table 1 : Mapping the Spectrum of Sexual Interactions ..... 6

## 1. Introduction

In January 1999 Sweden passed a law to prohibit the purchase of sexual services thereby becoming the first country to pass legislation that addresses the demand in sexual exploitation. Under The Act on prohibiting the purchase of sexual services (SFS 1998:408), hereby referred to as the Sex Purchase Act, it is illegal to buy a sexual service but legal to sell, which means that persons buying sex are criminalised, while those being paid for the sexual acts, are decriminalised. The decriminalisation of the person that sells sex is combined with provision of support and assistance to exit prostitution. These social interventions were seen as a key part of the Law as indicated in the Women's Peace Bill (1997/98:55) that states: "... *the social interventions will, of course, continue to be important in order to motivate prostitutes to seek help and get away from the destructive life they lead.*"

The Sex Purchase Act entered into force on 1 January 1999. In connection with the sexual crimes reform of 2005, the Act was revoked and replaced by new legislation on the purchase of sexual services (Chapter 6, Section 11 of the Swedish Penal Code)<sup>1</sup>. It currently reads:

*A person who, in cases other than those previously referred to in this Chapter, obtains casual sexual relations in return for a payment, is guilty of purchase of sexual services and is sentenced to a fine or imprisonment for at most one year. The provision in the first paragraph also applies if the payment was promised or made by another person. Act 2011:517.*

The compensation can be both monetary and in-kind with the latter being, for instance in form of drugs or alcohol. The attempt or intention to obtain a casual sexual relation in exchange for payment is also punishable according to chapter 6, section 15 of the Penal Code. The scale of penalties for the purchase of sexual services is, at present, a fine<sup>2</sup> or imprisonment for at most one year. Although the legislation is gender-neutral in its terms, there is an acknowledgement that prostitution in Sweden is gendered with the majority of those that buy sexual services being men and those selling being women.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the law was to combat prostitution by reducing the number of persons buying sex on the basis that in a society of equality between men and women it is "*unacceptable that men obtain casual sex with women for remuneration*" (1997/98:55). The demand for persons selling sex was considered to perpetuate prostitution and therefore the need for new recruitment of persons providing sexual services. Through a deterrent legal action and enhanced stigma towards the buyers, the Act on prohibiting the purchase of sexual services was expected to have a norm-changing effect in society. Due to the link between prostitution and trafficking, it was expected that by addressing prostitution the Law would also reduce human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation as well as deter extensive organised criminal groups and individuals abroad from establishing their prostitution operations in Sweden. With the Law, Sweden wanted to send a message that prostitution is an unacceptable phenomenon in society and must be combatted (1997/98:55).

---

<sup>1</sup> [Legislation on the purchase of sexual services - Government.se](https://www.government.se/legislation-on-the-purchase-of-sexual-services)

<sup>2</sup> The Government plans to propose the removal of fines from the penalty scale – see "Action Package to intensify work against men's violence against women", 2021, p10.

<sup>3</sup> SOU:2010:49; Ekberg, 2018

On July, 2018, the sexual consent law came into effect and serves as a compliment to the Sex Purchase Act. The law has introduced two new offences, negligent rape and negligent sexual abuse and both carry a maximum prison term of four years. The lack of consent is enough to constitute a crime even where there are no threats or force involved or taking advantage of a person's passivity or particular vulnerable position. According to this law, a person has to express with words and actions that he or she agrees to the sexual interaction. The law states: *"In the judgement of whether participation is voluntary, it should be taken into special consideration whether consent has been expressed in words or actions."* There has been a first conviction from the Swedish Supreme Court stating negligent rape.

The impact of the Sex Purchase Act has extended beyond Swedish borders and the Swedish approach to addressing prostitution has become known as the 'Nordic Model' after laws inspired by the original Swedish legislation were passed in Norway and Iceland in 2009. Similar laws have also been adopted in Northern Ireland (2012), Canada (2014), France (2016), Republic of Ireland (2017), and Israel (2019). In 2014 the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe both passed resolutions that recommended the Nordic Model approach as an effective way to tackle trafficking and prostitution in Europe.

## 1.1. Framing the Problem

The Sex Purchase Act is a result of years of research and public debates that took place in Sweden, in particular between 1977 and 1999, when prostitution began to be recognised as a social problem and a gender equality issue between men and women in society<sup>4</sup>.

Historically, prostitution was not a criminal offence and between 1847 and 1864, legislation had a focus on the persons selling sexual services with a regulatory system that required them to be "inspected" once a week for sexually transmitted infections and to follow certain rules in regard to housing and how they conducted themselves in public spaces. From 1864, the focus shifted the protection of persons providing sexual services from abuse as well as the spread of sexually transmitted infections as a show of society's moral position. However, sexual interactions between unmarried individuals were not criminalised unless they ended up with a child. This system was abolished in 1918 after which women could not be monitored in the same way.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s changed society's view of sexuality and thereby what constituted sexual crimes. There was no longer a need to regulate sex among consenting adults and the sex industry became increasingly varied resulting in worsening conditions for persons selling sex, the majority of whom were women. Substance abuse became more common as well.

This led to new public debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s about sexual relations and power differences between women and men. Between 1977 and 1995, extensive government-commissioned research was undertaken to understand the problem and develop solutions. In the report "Prostitution in Sweden"<sup>5</sup>, prostitution was finally framed as a social problem that primarily affected women of low socio-economic status and that resulted in adverse health outcomes for persons selling sex. During this period

---

<sup>4</sup> See SOU 1981:71; SOU 1995:15 and Olsson, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> SOU 1981:71

of thorough studies and public debates, the “driver” was seen to be demand for sexual services and, thus, criminalisation of sex purchase was emphasized as something that would have a deterring effect and thereby reduce prostitution. It was also emphasized that the legislation existed to protect sexual integrity and not an issue of morality or decency and thereby the use of the term “sexual offences”.

In 1998, the Government introduced the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services to the Parliament in a legislative proposal that included a package of measures to be taken to prevent sexual violence against women (Women’s Peace Bill 1997/98:55). On 1 January, 1999, the Sex Purchase Act described above was enacted and exists to the present day.

Alongside the Sex Purchase Act, various other legislative texts also serve to restrict and combat sexual offences. The following are of particular importance in this context:

Forced prostitution and human trafficking is criminalised under the Swedish Penal Code<sup>6</sup>. Trafficking in Human Beings is defined as the procuring and purchasing of any sexual services or products obtained through force, coercion, abuse of a position of vulnerability, deception regardless of where the services are offered and/or bought (street, hotels, brothels, internet, escort services, massage parlours).

The Law that deals with the crime of procuring (Chapter 6, Section 12 of the Penal Code 2005:90) is another law that complements the Sex Purchase Act. The penalty is imprisonment for up to a maximum of four years and if the crime is considered severe, the sentence is up to ten years. Procuring is considered to be a crime against the State.

The production and distribution of sexual pictures and films of oneself is legal, even if the producer is a minor. However, pornography does become a crime if violence is displayed, or if the material is executed or displayed in public places and if minors are part of the material. There are ongoing discussions among Swedish policy makers about how to “...protect minors from participating in pornography and adults ... from being exposed to violence and abuse.”<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2. The Prostitution-Trafficking Link

As mentioned earlier, the sex industry was viewed as exploitative and damaging for the individuals involved as well as for the society at large. By criminalising the purchase of sexual services and thereby reducing the demand for such services, the Sex Purchase Act would invariably result in reducing the prevalence of prostitution. This was also believed to assist in combating trafficking in human-beings for sexual exploitation since demand for sexual services “drives” both phenomena.

As trafficking was on the rise internationally and in Sweden at the time the law was proposed, the Government wanted to send a message to other countries on its position in relation to these questions and thereby deter groups or individuals to establish their criminal operations in the country and also commissioned the National Police Board to serve as National Rapporteur on matters concerning trafficking for sexual purposes (Women’s Peace Bill 1997/98:55):

---

<sup>6</sup> Section 1a of Chapter 4 of the Swedish Penal Code

<sup>7</sup> Action Package to intensify efforts against men’s violence against women, 2021, p5.

*“This also counteracts the growing crime that almost invariably follows in its footsteps in the form of economic crimes, drug crimes and the violence that this usually entails.”*

Demand reduction in the context of human trafficking prevention and whether it is possible to distinguish between consensual and non-consensual sexual interactions are matters of public and academic debate. Below is a table developed from existing literature on what comprises consensual and non-consensual sexual interactions, which shows that sexual exploitation can take place beyond trafficking<sup>8</sup>. Understanding this link influences the approach adopted to address the phenomenon as has been done in Sweden.

In the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 2000 (usually referred to as the Palermo Protocol) the central role of demand reduction in preventing trafficking is made in Article 9 of and reads as follows: *“State Parties shall adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures...to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking”* (Article 9 (5) UN Palermo Protocol). In line with the Palermo Protocol, a comprehensive legislation that imposed criminal liability for trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes entered into force in Sweden in 2002. This anti trafficking law in the Penal Code criminalises attempt, preparation, and conspiracy to commit human trafficking as well as a failure to report such a crime, and the Sex Purchase Act serves as a complement to achieving that goal.

Non-Commercial		Commercial	
Consensual	Non-Consensual	Consensual	Non-Consensual
Adult Sex	Sexual Abuse/Violence	Sex-Work	Sexual Exploitation
Incest*	Incest	Escort	Escort
	Rape	Phone-Sex	Phone-Sex
	Forced Marriage**	Web-Cam Sex	Web-Cam Sex
		On-Line Sex	On-line Sex
		Pornography	Pornography
			Sexual Servitude
			Forced Marriage**

\* Consensual sex between adult relatives.  
 \*\*Forced Marriage manifests in many different ways and it is highly debatable. In this report it falls under both commercial and non-commercial forms of sexual interaction since it can also entail a monetary or non-monetary gain for the family.  
 Source: Kaime-Atterhög and Nart, 2017

Table 1 : Mapping the Spectrum of Sexual Interactions

<sup>8</sup> Kaime-Atterhög and Nart, 2017.

## 2. The “Building Blocks” of the Swedish Model<sup>9</sup>

Research carried out in 2018 and in 2021<sup>10</sup> has identified three interrelated components that comprise the Swedish Model, referring to them as the “building blocks” of the Swedish Model (see figure 1). These three components are: the legal (restrictive) component addressing the demand (or on the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services in order to reduce the demand for such services); the social (supportive and restorative) component addressing services to persons involved in prostitution to facilitate exit and recovery for those selling and to provide counselling support to those that purchase sexual services; and the educational (transformative) component with the aim of changing societal attitudes to prostitution. To date, the focus of the Swedish Model has been placed on the legal aspects, namely, the criminalisation of the purchase and facilitation of sexual services in order to reduce demand and to some extent on the transformative component to change societal norms.

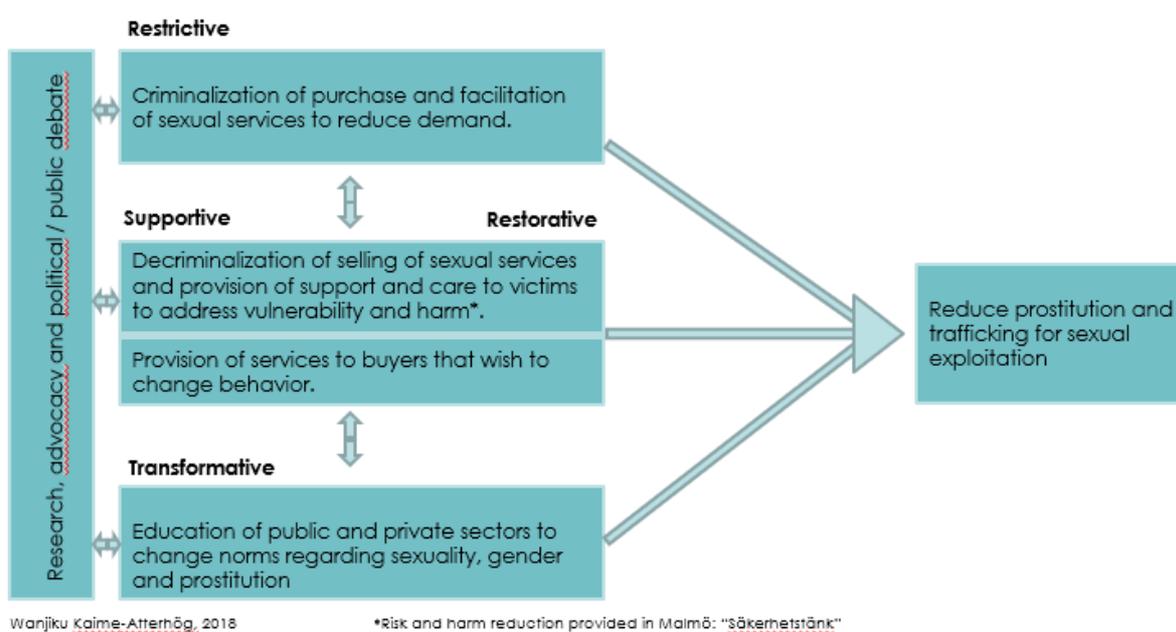


Figure 1 : The “Building Blocks” of the Swedish Model, Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, 2018

### 2.1. The Legal (restrictive) Component

Swedish legislation provides clear guidelines to all Governmental institutions involved in the work of identifying, arresting and convicting persons that do not comply with the restrictions of the Law in relation to purchasing sexual services from the police to the

<sup>9</sup> This section of the report is based primarily on data collected in Stockholm, Malmö and Gävle, Sweden, in 2018 within the DESIRE research project and includes excerpts from the research report (see Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2019). Those interviewed included victims of trafficking, persons selling sex, persons buying sex, the general public, policy makers, law enforcement officials and staff of civil society organisations. Complementary data from an on-going project initiated by the author in collaboration with two organisations in Stockholm that builds on the findings of the above-mentioned project, is also included (Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2021). Those interviewed in this second study include persons that are receiving support and care and are either on their way to leaving prostitution or have already left. In drafting this report, a critical analysis of existing government documents on the topic has also been conducted and five additional key stakeholders including two that are working with migrant women engaged in prostitution in Sweden have been interviewed.

<sup>10</sup> Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2019 and Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2021.

courts. In the Proposal to the Parliament in 1998 (Women's Peace Bill), the Police were mentioned as the key actors in the enforcement of the laws relating to prostitution and trafficking in terms of surveillance and *Specialised Police Units addressing prostitution and trafficking* (and targeted education for police officers) were established in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö<sup>11</sup>. However, implementation involves the coordinated work of several Government agencies working against prostitution and human trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation that include: the *Gender Equality Agency* that since 2018 is appointed by the government to function as the National Coordinator against prostitution and trafficking<sup>12</sup>; *National Method Support Team Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking (NMT)*; *The Ambassador Against Trafficking* (first appointment in 2016); *The Rapporteur Against Trafficking* (first appointment in 1998); *The Swedish Prosecution Authority*; *The Migration Authority*; and *Mikamottagningen*.

Law enforcers work closely with public and civic organisations providing direct services to persons selling sex, persons buying sex and those exiting prostitution.

All respondents interviewed except one person that sold sexual services and that represented an Association of sex workers indicated that prostitution was a societal issue and the law sets the tone for different actors. However, the penalty for purchasing sexual services in form of fines was seen by many respondents to be too low and the majority of the respondents, including those selling sex, indicated that the penalty should be higher if it should deter persons from buying sex. On the other hand, others indicated that the shame was sufficient punishment.

Another important factor mentioned by the respondents was the number of low convictions. The lawyers and prosecutors interviewed in 2018 gave a picture of how they take the case from the ground once a woman is rescued and sheltered until the case comes to the judge who often are not aware of the backgrounds and social contexts of the victims and the complexity entailed in bringing them thus far in the court procedures. Although the prosecutors are specialised on prostitution and trafficking, the judges are not<sup>13</sup>. According to the respondents, their argument for not training on the subject matter is that, according to their profession, they have to be objective and this was said to greatly influence the ruling in most cases (see figure 2)<sup>14</sup>.

Respondents did however indicate that the person selling sex in the Swedish context had the law on their side and because the buyers had the knowledge that they were the ones committing a crime, it controlled how violent they could be for fear of being exposed or reported. One respondent said: *"The law gives women the upper hand since the men are afraid of hurting them to an extent that it requires police intervention since that will draw attention to them."* (V:A)

Those exiting prostitution and victims of trafficking undergoing care indicated that the law enabled them not to put shame and blame on themselves since it was not their fault.

---

<sup>11</sup> These Units have now been transformed into human trafficking units encompassing all forms of trafficking.

<sup>12</sup> It functions as a national contact point and provides operative and strategic method support to governmental authorities and civil society organisations in questions relating to prostitution and human trafficking.

<sup>13</sup> Also addressed in the National Action Plan against prostitution and trafficking (2018).

<sup>14</sup> The Swedish Crime Prevention Council (BRÅ) has been assigned the task of following up on the Sex Purchase Act in relation to child sexual exploitation and within that assignment is expected to make an analysis of how a person exploited in prostitution can be considered a victim of the crime. This would have a difference in the court process and ruling as the majority of trafficking cases today end up as crimes against the State (procurement), and the exploited persons become witnesses to the crime instead of victims of the crime.

One respondent remarked: *“The Swedish law stands with the women and shows ... this is how you get rid of the problem and not to blame the women but those who profit from them and buy them... that is what is a crime. It is actually a very smart way of dealing with it (prostitution). We stand with you and not say that you did wrong or blame you. The law takes away this old picture that women want too much sex and shows that we have the same equality.”* (L:S)

A young person that had recently exited from selling sex interviewed in the study conducted in 2018 indicated that capacity building for the police force combined with prevention strategies including education continued to be two priority areas for the phenomena to be successfully addressed. Another respondent, a civil society caregiver, mentioned the importance of providing adequate resources to the police to enable them to prioritise their surveillance activities.

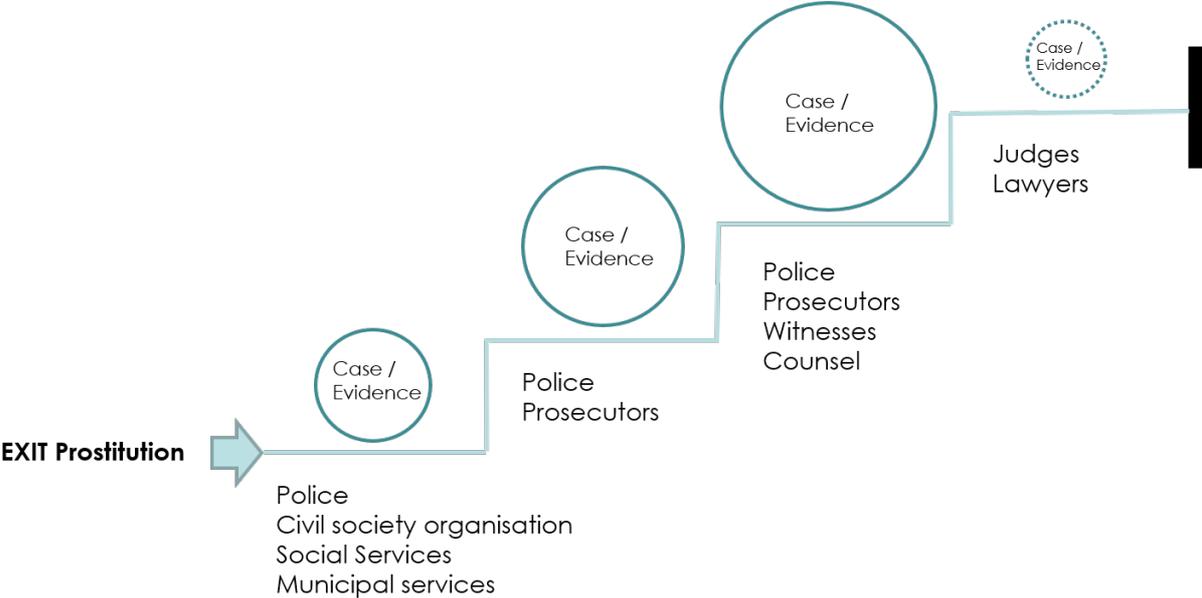


Figure 2 : Court Process; trafficking or procurement? Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, 2018

**2.2. The Social (supportive and restorative) Component**

Unlike the legal component, Swedish legislation does not provide clear guidelines for the work with the social component of the Model addressing the decriminalisation of the selling of sexual services and emphasis was put on the development and documentation of methods for working with this target group. Indeed, the Proposal to the Government reads as follows:

*“A very important part of the work to reduce prostitution is the efforts made by social services. ... social interventions have primarily had short-term effects and it is difficult to see that social interventions have combatted prostitution in the longer term...The National Board of Health and Welfare should therefore provide support for method development with regard to the social initiatives that are implemented at the local level. This information should be disseminated and provide a basis for the continuous change and improvements of the efforts”* (Women’s Peace Bill, 1997/98:55).

Leaving prostitution was said by both those that were involved in selling sex and those involved in providing care at different levels to be a long, complex process. At the first contact many of those selling sex were on “survival mode” and had normalized the world of prostitution in order to cope. With the new relationships with professional caregivers, they begin to realise that something is wrong and caregivers mentioned that change came in different stages depending on each individual woman and the circumstances around her. The goal of the caregivers was to disrupt the normalized “bubble world” of prostitution by replacing the relationships and “rooms” of exploitation with relationships and “rooms” of healing and restoration (see figure 3). Below is a brief description of the three “rooms” where healing took place according to the caregivers interviewed.

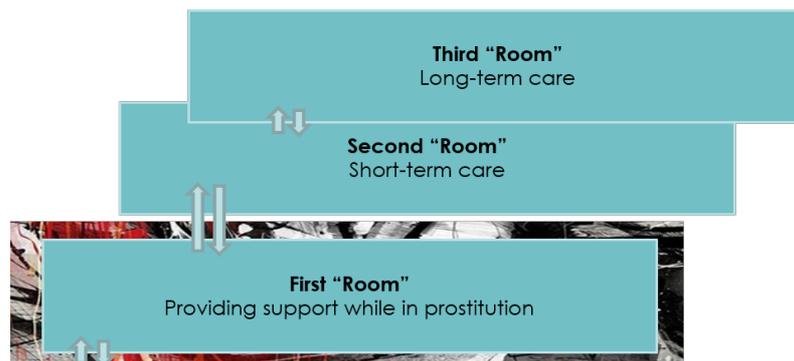


Figure 3 : “Rooms” of Healing and Restoration, Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög, 2021

### **The First “Room” - Providing Support while in Prostitution**

Respondents in the studies representing frontline organisations that provide services to persons selling and buying sex mentioned a number of outreach programmes that are in place to provide support to persons selling sex and that serve as the first point of contact. These services are primarily delivered by social workers on the street as well as on internet. This “first space of contact” is crucial and is a window of opportunity to exit prostitution or not to purchase sexual services. Organisations mentioned using various strategies to establish a relationship and build trust by being present in those spaces where exploitation takes place and providing snacks, conversation, and condoms (the latter only in Malmö). Once a relationship is established, some caregivers also offer medical advice, health care and counselling or provide information about further support or refer to other services. In some cases, caregivers have also gathered information of abuse and provided advise and support in filing a police case. When used well, this space was mentioned to be effective for achieving an initial engagement with individuals which could lead to more sustained engagement with specialist or mainstream caregivers. A number of persons that had exited prostitution who were interviewed indicated that they first learned of the services offered by these frontline organisations through contact on internet or on the streets or through word of mouth from other women on the street, indicating that maintaining a presence on the street and on internet is important in terms of making contact with this target group.

*Mikamottagningen is an arm of Social Services that offers support and practical help to those who wish to stop selling sexual services through their outreach programme and micro-reception centres currently in operation in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Borås. The team of social workers that are based in Stockholm have a strong presence in the “rooms of exploitation”, namely the street and internet environments. Although their efforts are carried out mainly in the first and second “rooms” of healing and restoration, their goal is ensure that the persons they come into contact with receive long-term care and, consequently, exit prostitution. Thus, collaboration with and links to other sections of Social Services, with the police and with Civil Society Organisations and following up thereafter to ensure that support gets through to their clients, form an important part of their work. Social workers from Mikamottagningen also join the police in their operations to arrest buyers of sexual services in order to provide support to those selling sex.*

### **The Second “Room” - Short-Term Care**

Many of the organisations interviewed also indicated the need for providing services that are in between prostitution and restorative care. These were said to be in form of medical care or counselling services after establishing relationships on the streets and/or internet and were mentioned to be either sporadic or regular visits. The availability of this form of support services ensures that there is an immediate opportunity for an individual involved in prostitution to continue to access support after initial contact with the caregivers and recognises the often chaotic lives of those involved in prostitution and the need to continually be present, engaged and connected to ensure that opportunities for offering support are sustained. Persons that had exited prostitution highlighted the importance of these services as a place where they could obtain counselling, guidance and friendship as well as a place of safety, allowing them the time and space to consider and fulfil their ongoing needs and aspirations for education and employment and to leave prostitution at their own pace.

Caregivers interviewed in this study referred to services provided at this level as a form of crisis management, with the aim of achieving some form of stability through addressing the immediate and perceived needs of their clients. These needs were said to differ from person to person and for some it was simply a space to talk and reflect on the past and the present and to begin to get a glimpse of the future at their own pace. The caregivers mentioned the importance of not being judgmental but in creating a safe space to express fear and pain and explore healing possibilities. Timing in providing stability was mentioned as a key factor for success. Because of the multiple and interrelated needs of clients, supporting them to achieve this stability entailed working across sectors to address significant issues affecting their lives, such as housing, employment, drug addiction, trauma, and ultimately exiting prostitution. The biggest challenge was noted to be lack of clear guidelines facilitating the development and implementation of a care plan/pathway, developed in close consultation with the concerned persons and caregivers from relevant sectors such as social, law and health.

*Ellencenter is an organisation that operates within the three “rooms” of care. Although the organisation does not have a presence on the streets or on internet, the national chat helpline often serves as a platform for initiating contact with children and young persons up to the age of 25 years that are sexually exploited, providing a low threshold for support. Once contact is established, children and young people can access further support, legal advice and trauma therapy at the help centre in Stockholm.*

### **The Third “Room” - Long-Term Care**

Caregivers in the studies mentioned that supporting persons to find an alternative to prostitution is a process that involves several stages that occur over time. During this period, provision of specialized care is key and may be interrupted by periods when the persons may return briefly to prostitution. Caregivers mentioned the importance of providing flexible care based on each persons’ capacity and readiness to exit safely and effectively. This capacity and readiness to exit prostitution was also said to be influenced by the professional capacity of caregivers as well as “availability and readiness of the system” to respond with appropriate support and care. Due to the lack of an established integrated system in Sweden, caregivers from the public sector and civil society mentioned that they had to act as points of contact for the individuals while ensuring that they are in contact with other appropriate services to ensure support for their clients’ progress towards exiting prostitution. This was described as an extremely time-consuming process relying solely on the goodwill of individual caregivers for success.

The threshold for non-Swedish nationals exiting prostitution was said to be higher with organisations having no long-term solutions to offer, which meant that conversations remained mostly at the relationship level. One social worker had this to say about the lack of sustainable options to this target group: *“We have nothing to offer them.”* As a great proportion of those selling sex in Sweden are largely immigrants escaping conflict, poverty, family dysfunction and so on and mainly come from poor countries in the global south as well as Eastern Europe, it means that persons may continue to sell sex because there exists no economic alternative to prostitution.

Other challenges mentioned by respondents in all the research sites were the limited availability of shelters providing long-term support and care to victims of trafficking and those exiting prostitution (there was one in each research site) as well as availability of stable funding for the work. Another challenge mentioned was the temporary permit provided to victims of trafficking for reflection (one-6 months), which was deemed insufficient to recover from the adverse effects of prostitution and at the same time undergo court proceedings adequately. It was reported that very few were issued longer residence permits or granted asylum on humanitarian grounds. One respondent said that *“the hard thing is going from identification to support...they come from this dark period into a judicial process. It is important with places for rest and reflection and then move on to restorative care... to deliver settlement kind of work.”* (CS:E).

A few exceptions were noted as in the cases of persons that find their way to restorative care programmes of civil society organisations including the National Support Programme that is offered by the Swedish Civil Society Platform Against Trafficking.

*The National Support Programme is implemented by the Swedish Civil Society Platform Against Trafficking and complements statutory support, by providing an additional safety net to victims of human trafficking, whilst also ensuring that Sweden complies with the European Convention. Through the support programme, not only individuals who have been formally identified as victims, but those who are potential victims can gain entry through its informal identification process. The programme was developed in 2015 and piloted during 2016, after which time funding for the programme has been made upon application of various grants. There is currently no long-term financial solution offered by the Government. The programme has developed over the course of the number of years it has been running, both as a result of varying funding and of need. The Programme seeks to ensure 30 days reflection and recovery, 90 days integration and support to cover costs such as those associated with dentist, legal bills and other one-off payments required by an individual victim. The money is applied for by certified safe houses/protected shelters who are members of the Swedish Platform, which guarantees a certain level of quality to the services provided.*

Although these three levels of support and care have been presented above in a linear manner, it is important to note that in reality they are overlapping and care provided in the second and third “rooms” can be interrupted by episodes of prostitution when clients sell sexual services. Services in all “rooms” of care are best implemented within a multi-agency, integrated system of care that is sensitive to each person’s needs.

### **2.3. The Educational (transformative) Component**

The Sex Purchase Act has, from the onset, been seen to have a normative effect in society by changing attitudes towards prostitution. By criminalising the purchase of sexual services, it was expected that there would be a shift in shame and stigma from those selling to those purchasing the sexual services. Indeed, those interviewed in the studies that had exited prostitution confirmed that the Law had helped in shifting blame and facilitating healing. The respondents said there were always ways in which shame manifested itself in situations, places and in their minds and it was a constant battle. They said the law was a great help as they now know that it was not their fault since blame was one of the factors that brought guilt and shame. They often asked themselves why they got into it and why they did not leave earlier. A Law not only frames the problem and provides guidelines for implementation of the solution but also sets the tone in the society indicating that it is not acceptable or “normal” to buy sex. Persons interviewed mentioned that the public awareness and support of the law had changed with the majority of the Swedish population in support of the Law. An online survey carried out among 400 members of the general public in 2018 confirmed this, with 80% being opposed to buying sex: (see figures 4 and 5).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Kaime-Atterhög, et al, 2019.

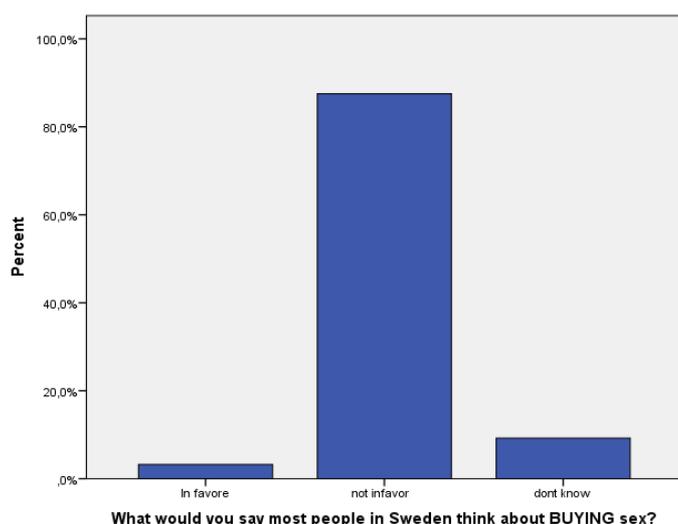


Figure 4 Views of the general public on buying sex

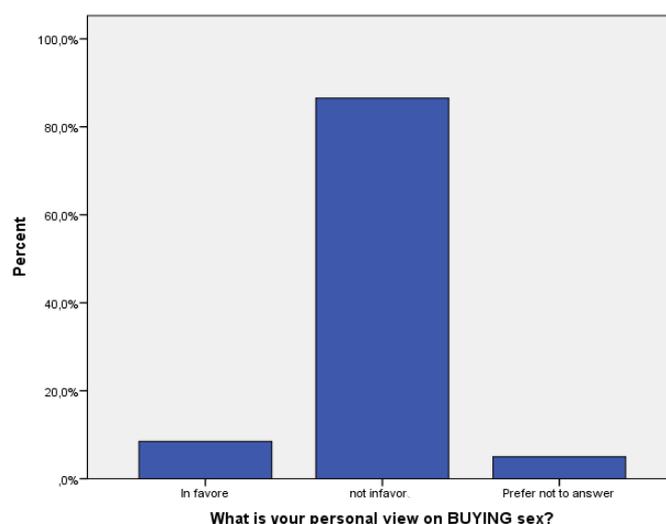


Figure 5 : Personal views of the general public on buying sex

Various educational programmes exist at various municipalities as well as national-level campaigns by the Gender Equality Agency.<sup>16</sup> However, the bulk of the work being undertaken at the local level under this component is largely carried out on project-basis by Civil Society Organisations singly or in collaboration with Government agencies. Three successful projects included in the study conducted in 2018 are carried out by Real Stars, Changing Attitudes and the Salvation Army<sup>17</sup>. Child 10 is also an important voice when it comes to advocating for the rights of sexually exploited children and young people to information, support and care.

Respondents that had exited prostitution that were interviewed indicated that they first became aware of the Law during the initial contact with caregivers. However, African undocumented immigrants were not aware of the law and especially that it did not criminalize those selling and were in fear of being identified and deported. The stakeholders working with immigrant groups in Stockholm mentioned that persons facilitating prostitution and buyers were aware of their lack of knowledge and fear and exploited this by making demands including providing them with sexual services at no charge.

In all studies, respondents mentioned more extensive awareness creation activities from an early age as well as in the various “rooms of exploitation” as key to providing information to the general public on the Swedish Model and to invariably changing attitudes towards prostitution in the long term.

### *Collaboration between Stakeholders (across components)*

There were many good models of collaboration between stakeholders that were mentioned in all research sites. Often, contact with victims of trafficking and persons

<sup>16</sup> The National Board of Health and Welfare has prepared materials that provide support to children, young people and adults exploited in the system of prostitution (2015). The Board has also developed various educational materials for social and health professionals to increase knowledge and awareness of prostitution and facilitate their work with the target group (2018).

<sup>17</sup> The Helsingborg model is described under “Collaboration between Stakeholders” below.

engaged in prostitution is initiated through outreach and surveillance work undertaken by civil society organisations, government institutions working specifically with the target groups (for instance Mikamottagningen), grassroots individuals and the police. Police officers, Mikamottagningen staff and civil society organisations with drop-in centres (where target groups seek help) may refer victims of trafficking to protected shelters for rehabilitation while some civil society staff from organisations that combine outreach with rehabilitation seek out the target group in different contexts and refer them to their services directly.

*The Salvation Army in Helsingborg has since 2015 developed and implemented a local model to respond to human trafficking and prostitution that brings together the police, social services, civil society actors and the business sector in the city. This local initiative enables identification of victims and on the basis of this offer appropriate support through social services in the municipality and/or civil society in collaboration. A local action plan has been developed in order to respond to local cases, and work is continuously being done to understand how the issue presents itself in the city. There is a growing awareness across the city of the issues at hand and through training offered, competence is growing across key professions such as those working in a local housing association and the hotel sector, as well as within social services.*

### 3. Thinking Ahead

Research carried out in 2021 as well as earlier research carried out in 2018 shows that Sweden got it right on three fronts when the Sex Purchase Act was enacted:

#### 1. Framing the problem

Before the Act was enacted, extensive research commissioned by the Government took place that helped in framing prostitution as a social problem with harmful consequences for those involved and for society at large. By criminalising the demand for sexual services and decriminalising the provision of such services, there was a shift in liability, shame and guilt to the consumers of the services given the previous national measures taken to address prostitution. This position of framing the problem with a consideration of the broader picture that includes an understanding of the contributing factors and the vulnerable position of those involved is illustrated in the conceptual framework below (see figure 6) developed by Kaime-Atterhög (1996) for mapping and understanding the context and dynamics that can lead to exploitation of vulnerable people in society<sup>18</sup>. The framework has been adapted and applied in 2018 to understand the context of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation<sup>19</sup>. It shows the complex and interlinked factors that characterize the process that “pushes”, “triggers” (contributing factors) and “pulls” (the dream for a better future) to increase the risk of people to be exploited in prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

---

<sup>18</sup> Kaime-Atterhög, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2019.

The framework also maps the context of vulnerability in transit and destination countries including the “intervening factors” and “aggravating factors” that facilitate the exit from the cycle of exploitation or its continuation respectively. In some cases, those who opt to continue in prostitution may eventually become perpetrators themselves thereby enabling the scaling of the phenomenon significantly or that cycle of exploitation may be continued through their own children. Laws and policies under “intervening” factors set the tone for services in the countries of source, transit and destination including preventive measures at various levels in the society.

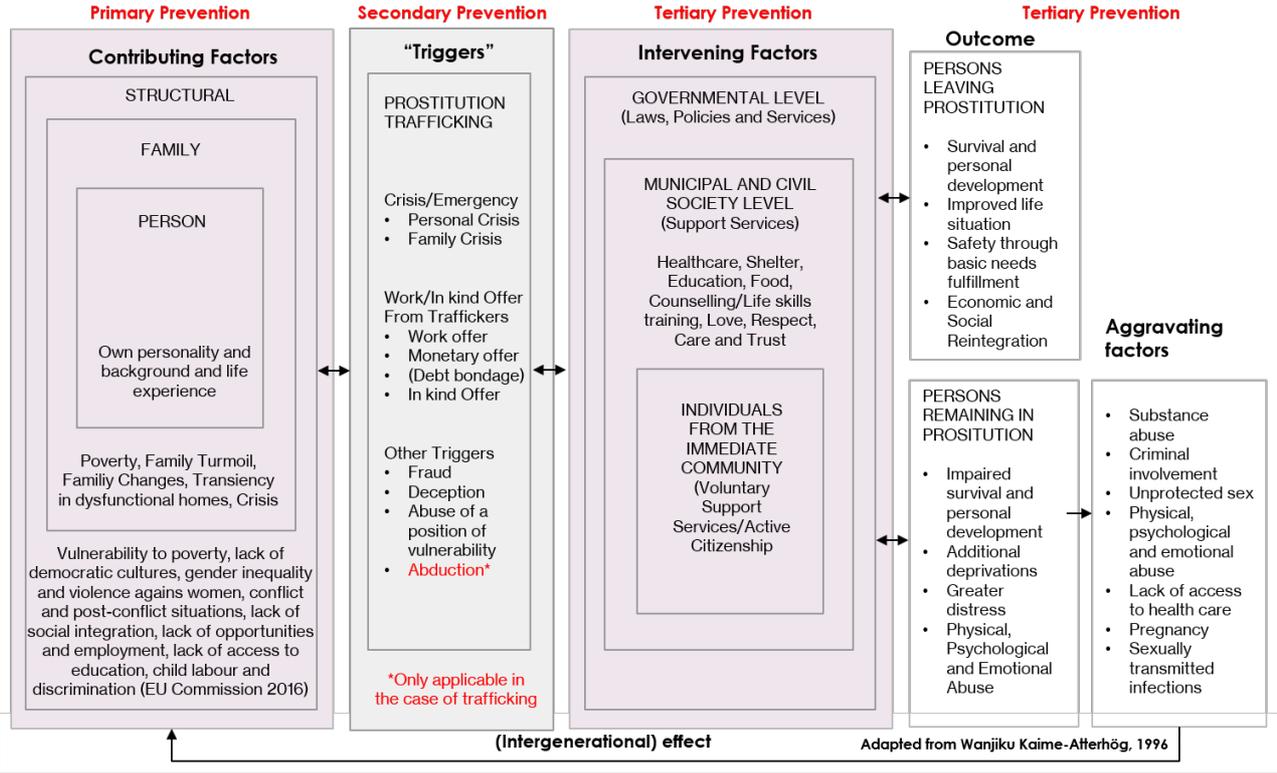


Figure 6 : Vulnerability in the Context of Prostitution and Trafficking. Adapted from Kaime-Atterhög, 1996

2. Recognising the link between prostitution and trafficking

The Swedish Model recognises the clear link between the existence of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes with demand for sexual services as the “driver” of both phenomena. Recent research carried out in Sweden<sup>20</sup> has confirmed this thin line between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation where consent and non-consent is not static but a fluid process that is grounded in a changing context based on vulnerability and resulting harm.

According to the conceptual framework above, prostitution can be a vehicle to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The “choice” of someone to engage in exploitative situations can be “triggered” by a “false and misinformed” or “genuine and legitimate” offer for a job, money or in kind benefits against a background of the context of structural, family and personal socio-economic, psychological and/or physical vulnerability. For this reason, the work being undertaken by the Swedish Crime

<sup>20</sup> Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2019.

Prevention Council (BRÅ) to analyse how a person that is exploited in prostitution can be considered a victim of the crime is of great importance here and would facilitate a victim-based criminal justice system.

### 3. Identifying the components to be addressed

The Swedish Model combines three interrelated components in addressing prostitution (and trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation), namely criminalization targeting the demand of sexual services, i.e., the buyers of sex and prospective buyers of sex; decriminalization of the selling of sexual services addressing the vulnerability of persons involved to reduce harm and support exit and recovery; and education to change societal norms (see figure 1).

These three factors are what has made the Swedish Model an innovative approach to addressing prostitution and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. However, as noted in section two of this report, although all three components have been noted to be important and interrelated, the Sex Purchase Act puts an emphasis on the demand for sexual services, which is seen to perpetuate both prostitution and trafficking. A clear strategy with supporting budgets exist for the work undertaken by law enforcement institutions. In relation to the transformative component, a number of measures have been adopted to increase the knowledge and awareness of the general public even though there are still gaps in effectively reaching children and young people with relevant information.

The supportive and restorative component, however, needs to be strengthened and funded. The findings from the studies show that support and care in all the identified three “rooms” of care is largely undertaken by civil society organisations and, to a lesser extent by Mikamottagningen. This is done with limited resources and no clear strategy and guidelines that sets out the actions to be taken by the relevant sectors to support and assist persons that wish to leave prostitution. In addition, the studies have shown that a large proportion of those engaged in prostitution or that are trafficked to Sweden for purposes of sexual exploitation are non-Swedish nationals. Thus, engaging the countries of source in conversation on appropriate restorative measures is crucial and will entail providing funding to support the journey to a restored life that invariably begins in the country of destination where sexual exploitation takes place and extends to the source country for those repatriated. Such interventions should also focus on prevention, supporting the efforts of source countries to address contributing factors and “triggers” by building resilience in vulnerable groups and communities.

Protecting women involved in prostitution was one of the main reasons behind the change in legislation. This is an area that requires urgent Government attention in Sweden if the Model is to achieve its intended impact of reducing prostitution and trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation<sup>21</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup> Sweden clearly identifies prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation as forms of men’s violence against women. In the Action Package of measures to be taken to intensify efforts addressing violence against women of June 2021, five of the forty decision points listed are specifically directed towards the phenomena (decision points 10, 16, 17, 18, 33). It is of paramount importance that efforts to prevent and combat prostitution and trafficking are not sidelined in the bigger picture of actions addressing intimate partner violence against women and, indeed, clear mention and inclusion of prostitution and trafficking needs to be made especially in decision points 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14,15,17, 20, 24, 31, 35, 36, 37 and 38 of the June 2021 Action Package. An additional decision addressing action research, in relation to prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation, to be carried out in collaboration with the affected groups and their careproviders should also be considered. Moreover, all relevant proposed measures and, in particular decision point 18 on repatriation of non-Swedish victims, need to be clearly defined and resources allocated accordingly.

Countries looking to learn from Sweden must include all three components giving them equal priority and funding. Moreover, it is paramount to designate the task to a national body, that should take responsibility to coordinate, commission and fund research and capacity building initiatives, as well as support documentation, dissemination and adaptation of successful local initiatives across the three components of the Model (see figure 7) <sup>22</sup>. This also includes exploring and engaging in partnerships with the private sector and countries of source and evaluation of actions across the three components.

In **Conclusion**, the research carried out in 2018 and in 2021 has shown that the Swedish Model rests on thorough studies that reveal the harmful consequences of prostitution and the need to shift the perspective from those selling sexual services to those creating the demand for such services. Countries wanting to adopt the Swedish Model need to take into consideration the importance of framing the problem based on a contextual understanding of the phenomena of prostitution and trafficking, adopt an understanding of the clear link between prostitution and trafficking for purpose of sexual exploitation and give equal priority and funding to the implementation of all three components of the Model. Following up on those exiting prostitution in the different stages of care with sustainable alternatives is important to breaking the cycle of disadvantage and exploitation.

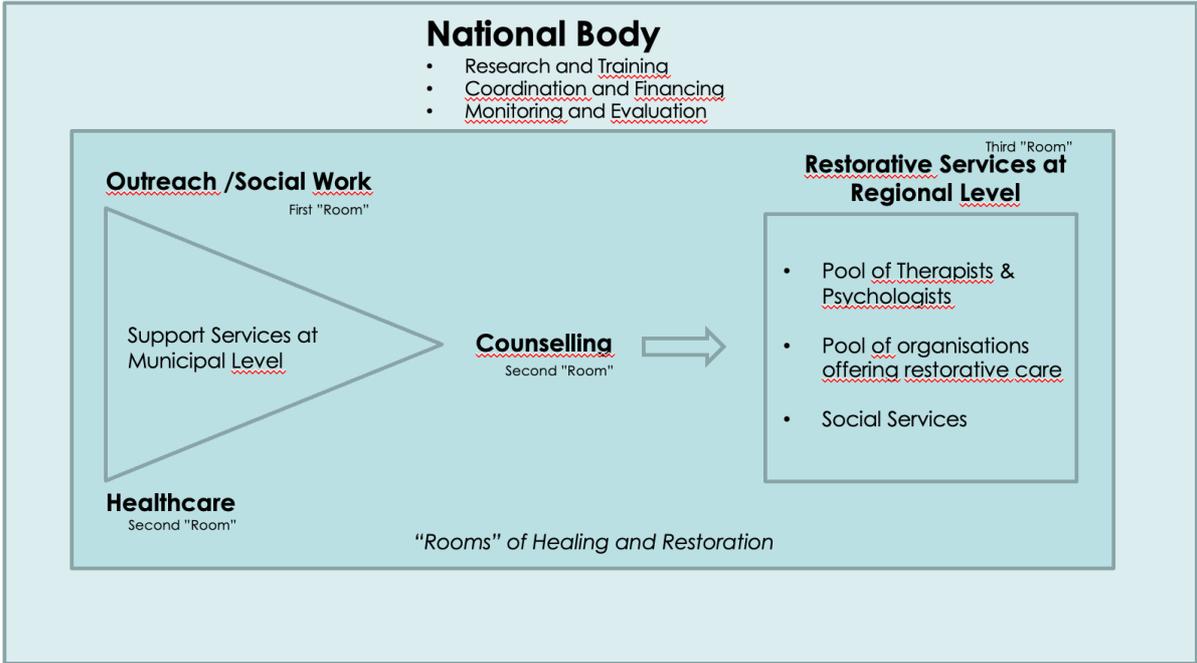


Figure 7 : Redefining Support and Care, Adapted in 2021 from Wanjiku Kaime-Atterhög 2018

<sup>22</sup> The Gender Equality Agency currently has the coordinating role in Sweden and its mandate and budget could be strengthened further to function in the role proposed here. When it comes to offering services in the three "rooms" of care, it is Social Services via respective municipalities that have the ultimate responsibility for helping people who find themselves in vulnerable situations such as prostitution according to Chapter 2, Section 1 of the Social Services Act. However the Social Services Act does not provide clear directives regarding what social interventions can be offered to people who are exposed to prostitution and human trafficking. Mikamottagningen in Stockholm and Gothenburg that have extensive experience in providing care to this target group should be established in each municipality to provide support and care falling under the first and second "rooms" and make referrals to specialised care at the regional level in the third "room". In sparsely populated Regions, a mobile team can provide care in the first and second "rooms". Clear work guidelines for adaptation and application at the municipal level can be developed from the work of Mikamottagningen in Stockholm and Gothenburg as well as civil society organisations with successful model programmes in place.

A multi-sectoral approach should be adopted in the delivery of related services as well as in capacity building to facilitate learning and working together as the sex sector is a rapidly changing context requiring stakeholders to also adjust approaches and interventions accordingly.

## 4. References

- Ekberg, 2018. The Swedish Approach to Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings Through a Gender Equality Lens. DOI:[10.1007/978-3-319-63192-9\\_34-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63192-9_34-1).
- Action Package to intensify measures against violence against women, 2021. Government of Sweden, Stockholm.
- Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2021. Redefining care for persons leaving prostitution in Stockholm, Sweden. Unpublished Field Report, Mid Sweden University, Sweden.
- Kaime-Atterhög et al, 2019. Understanding Demand for Sexual Services, Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation and Laws and Policies in SWEDEN: Summary Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations. Research Report, DESIrE Research Project (European Commission Grant number 4000008408; Deliverable no. 3.2). International Maternal and Child Health, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- Kaime-Atterhög, 2018. The DESIrE Project in Sweden: Reflections from the field. Unpublished Field Report. International Maternal and Child Health, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- Kaime-Atterhög and Nart, 2017. Towards a Comprehensive Definition of Sexual Exploitation Beyond the Context of Human Trafficking. Policy Paper, DESIrE Research Project (European Commission Grant number 4000008408; Deliverable no. 1.2). International Maternal and Child Health, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- Kaime-Atterhög, 1996. Street children and prostitution: the situation in Kenya. *NU-News on Health Care in Developing Countries*, 10, 27.
- Legislation on the purchase of sexual services (1998 :408). Government of Sweden, Stockholm.
- National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), 2018. About sex for a fee: Social Services and Healthcare work with children, young people and adults. Available at: [www.socialstyrelsen.se](http://www.socialstyrelsen.se) (utbildningspaketet sex mot ersättning).
- National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), 2015. Sex for a fee: Educational material on support and assistance for adults. ISBN: 978-91-7555-349-8.
- National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), 2015. Sex for a fee: Educational material protection and support for children and young people. ISBN: 978-91-7555-312-2.
- Olsson, H (2006). Från manlig rättighet till lagbrott: Prostitutionsfrågan i Sverige under 30 år, i *Sexuella trakasserier, våld mot kvinnor och prostitution*, Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift.
- Proposal 1997/98:55, Women's Peace Bill (Kvinnofrid). Stockholm.
- SOU 2010 :49 Evaluation of the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services 1999-2008. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- SOU 1995:15. 1993 Prostitution Investigation report (Könshandeln). Stockholm: Fritzes.
- SOU 1981:71, Prostitution in Sweden: Background and Measures. Stockholm.

