

Dear Minister Grapperhaus,

I am writing as a migrant sex worker to ask that you withdraw the law proposal for the Wet Regulerend Sekswork (WRS). No one else wants to combat abuse, exploitation, and forced labor in the sex industry than actual sex workers. We are not blind to the imperfections of the industry and this work, but it cannot be reduced to only sex trafficking. Otherwise you would have to treat the agricultural industry, domestic labor industry, and others in the same exact way. Treating sex work only as a problem will just create more problems. The WRS does exactly that, and it will only do more harm to sex workers by further stigmatizing us and making us an easy target.

First of all, why the need to raise the age to 21 years old? If I am allowed to drink and sign up for the army at age 18 and kill people, why can I not consent to legal sex work? If I am legally allowed to have sex in my private life, why can I not then charge money for it? This does not make sense. Nor will it protect underage sex workers. Believe it or not, there are underage people who choose to do sex work. This law will not convince them otherwise, it will only slap a debt of 20,750 euros on their backs when they get caught.

Second, when in history has registering a vulnerable, stigmatized, sometimes even hated group, ever helped that group? Many of us are already registered at the Chamber of Commerce, and we see how much discrimination this already brings us. We cannot open bank accounts or buy a house, for example. I am not even registered as a sex worker, but under the title “personal service provider,” and even this brings discrimination. Being registered blatantly as a sex worker will only exacerbate this and restrict my travel opportunities abroad. Putting all sex workers throughout the Netherlands into one single database will also make us all easy targets for hackers. And nowhere has it been proven that licensing sex workers effectively combats trafficking or exploitation in the first place.

Third, why the ridiculously high fine for people who are caught doing sex work without a license? If this law truly wishes to aid victims of trafficking and exploitation, what help is it to fine these people when they cannot get their hands on a license? Does the Dutch national government want to help sex workers, or does it simply want to punish us? The WRS does the latter with this financial penalty. And with what money do you think any of us will be able to pay this fine with? It’s as if you already know we will not be able to pay off this fine and in reality you wish to put us in jail instead.

Fourth, what good does threatening clients with jail time or a fine do? None. There is plenty of peer-reviewed research in countries with the Nordic model (where buying sex is illegal) that this policy only puts sex workers more at risk and that it does not decrease rates of either voluntary sex work or sex trafficking. My clients are good, normal people. In fact, they are quite boring because they are so normal. There is no need to threaten them with a punishment for visiting unlicensed sex workers. The few bad apples will remain bad apples, even if this WRS unfortunately passes. No law criminalizing them will stop them from being bad apples, as they will only thrive. Criminalizing sex work in any way, including the clients, only makes things worse

(<https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002680>).

Fifth, why also threaten third parties with jail time or a fine for helping unlicensed sex workers? And where do you draw the line for who counts as a third party or not? What if someone helps me but doesn’t know they are facilitating my sex work or that I do not have a license? Not everybody is a pimp.

Sixth, why does the WRS deny licenses to non-EU migrants? Again, if the goal of the law is genuinely to protect and help the most marginalized sex workers, surely migrants must be included. If this exclusion is intended to avoid trafficking, it only creates a better environment for traffickers to take advantage of. Migrants who cannot get a license will have to rely on others to find work and protection, and these others could end up exploiting or trafficking the migrant workers. And this does not even make sense in the context of the Netherlands, where Dutch women are identified as the group most likely to be sex trafficked in this country. Do you just dislike non-white immigrants? I understand that it is more rare that non-EU migrants are granted work visas in general, but if you truly want to protect the most marginalized in the sex industry, then work permits should be given to migrants who wish to work in the sex industry here.

And lastly, if you really want to make the sex industry a safer place for people who voluntarily choose to work in it, or who are unfortunately forced into it, please FULLY DECRIMINALIZE prostitution for both sex workers and clients.

Sincerely,
Sabrina Rose