

Report prepared by Pro Sentret, Oslo municipality

Pro Sentret¹ is Oslo Municipality's health and social service for persons with experience of selling sexual services. We run a health clinic, a drop-in centre and provide counselling and legal aid.

This report covers violence against cis and trans women who sell sexual services in Norway. The forms of violence include physical and psychological violence, sexual violence, stalking and economic and sexual violence.

Introduction: Violence and women who sell sex

Persons who sell sex are disproportionately affected by violence, something that has been documented by Pro Sentret in several reports.² In addition to violence from clients, the lifetime prevalence of violence committed by a family member or romantic partners is substantially higher than among the general population.³ We have registered incidents of blackmail, stalking and harassment against women, with the perpetrator threatening with outing the sex seller, demanding payment or other favours.

A majority of Pro Sentret's service users have one or several vulnerability factors that increase their risk of exposure to violence, including being a migrant (an overwhelming majority of persons who sell sex in Norway are migrants), poor language skills and or illiteracy, poverty and being from a socio-economically disadvantaged background, cognitive impairment (for a variety of reasons, both congenital and acquired), being LGBTQ+ (especially being trans), or being an illicit drug user.

As mentioned, the overwhelming majority of the persons who sell sex in Norway are migrants. Although some have permanent residency in Norway, most are in the country temporarily on tourist visas and such. This severely limits access to general support services.

The narrow scope of "violence in a close relationship"

To receive aid from a crisis shelter, the violence one has been exposed to must fall into the category of "violence in a close relationship", meaning violence perpetrated by (romantic) partners, and family members. With women who sell sex, Pro Sentret often finds this category too narrow to fit the violence our service users are subjected to. Clients do not fall into the "close relationship" category however, much of the violence sex sellers experience are from clients. Further, violence from pimps and other sex sellers also falls outside of this category. For women who are illicit drug users, drug dealers may subject them to violence.

¹ <https://www.prosentret.no/en/>

² Bjørndahl, Ulla (2012): Farlige forbindelser. En rapport om volden prostituerte i Oslo opplever. Pro Sentret; Bjørndahl, Ulla og Norli, Bjørg (2008): Fritt vilt. En undersøkelse om voldserfaringene til kvinner i prostitusjon. Pro Sentret.

Article 20: General support services, question 21

Access to health and social services for non-residents

Since most women who sell sex in Norway are migrants, few qualify for the Norwegian national social insurance scheme. This severely limits access to welfare services.

By law, all persons, regardless of residency status, are entitled to emergency and health services that are essential, including neonatal and emergency psychiatric care.⁴ Also included is care at the specialised assault centres for persons who have experienced sexual assault or partner/family violence.

What is considered to be essential health service is not specified in detail however, often leaving it up to health personnel to determine what treatment is deemed to be necessary. Cancer treatment for example, has been considered an essential health service for some of Pro Sentret's service users, but not all. Diabetes and hypotension are other examples of conditions that both can and cannot be deemed as necessary. Psychiatric treatment for conditions that are not acutely life-threatening for the patient and others, usually fall outside of the definition of essential health services. It is particularly worrying since many of Pro Sentret's service users suffer from severe psychiatric conditions such as PTSD. Women who are non-residents, and who suffer from cognitive impairment are an especially vulnerable group. They are more likely to fall victims to exploitation and human trafficking and are without protection or aid in Norway.

Article 53: Restraining or protection orders, question 54

In 2024, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act were made to facilitate and expedite the imposition of a reverse restraining alarm.⁵ The amendment has led to an increase in the use of reverse restraining alarm by 900 %.⁶

Part III: Emerging trends on violence against women and domestic violence, question 56

a) A surge in young Colombian women selling sex in Norway

Since 2023, Pro Sentret has observed a worrying increase in the number of very young women (aged 18–25) from Colombia. Most come from the city of Medellín and generally have no prior experience of selling sex before arriving in Norway. In most cases, they have also not travelled outside their home country before. This appears to be a development unique to Norway; partner organisations in other Nordic countries do not report similar experiences. Almost all of the women are brought to Norway through organised networks involving pimps operating both in Colombia and in Norway. Pro Sentret regards this development with great concern.

Pro Sentret has documented all forms of violence within this group – sexual, physical, psychological and economic. The women have little or no control over their own situation: they

⁴ <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2011-12-16-1255>

⁵ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/nye-regler-om-omvendt-voldsalarm-trer-i-kraft-8.-april-2024/id3031559/>

⁶ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/ett-ar-siden-reglene-ble-endret-mangedobling-av-omvendte-voldsalarmer/id3096682/>

are unable to choose or refuse clients, determine which services they provide, or decide when they work. Many are prevented by pimps from leaving prostitution, are forced to take clients and may be subjected to rape. They are often pressured into using drugs together with clients, and over time the violence becomes normalised to the extent that they both expect and accept being exposed to it.

Pimps use various forms of control and coercion, including confiscating passports and threatening to share compromising photographs. Economic violence is also common: the women are told that they receive 50 per cent of the income, but without any transparency regarding how much they earn, since pimps control payments. They often live in poor housing conditions, with too few bedrooms and frequent relocations. Young age and a youthful appearance are actively used in the pimps' marketing.

The workload is extensive, often involving 10–15 clients per day, which leads to significant health problems as well as physical and psychological exhaustion. Taken together, this describes a situation characterised by severe exploitation, lack of autonomy and systematic violence.

e) Thai marriage migration and the three-year rule

Thai nationals who migrate to marry Norwegian citizens are among the largest groups of marriage migrants in Norway.⁷ Nearly all Thai marriage migrants are women.

Thai marriage migrants are also among the largest groups of Pro Sentret's service users. Many of the Thai service users are to be considered vulnerable due to poor education (including illiteracy), poor language skills, and poor integration in Norwegian society. In some cases, the women have experience from the sex industry in Thailand, whilst others start selling sex for the first time after arriving in Norway. Often, the pressure from family members to send remissions home is great, and chances of finding employment outside of selling sex are slim (due to poor educational levels and poor language skills). Many of Pro Sentret's Thai service users have experienced severe physical, sexual and economic violence from Norwegian spouses.

To receive permanent residency in Norway, the marriage migrant needs to remain married to the Norwegian spouse for a minimum of three years. Pro Sentret is aware of cases where the Norwegian spouse has explicitly exploited this "three year-rule" to make the women remain in the marriage. In other cases, the Norwegian spouse divorces the Thai wife just before three years have passed, often to bring a new wife from Thailand.

In cases of domestic abuse, there is a possibility for the woman to apply for permanent residency on these grounds.⁸ In practice, this is often difficult to prove, especially since the woman for a variety of reasons may not have reported domestic violence to the Police. In

⁷ https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/innvandrer/artikler/familieinnvandring-og-ekteskapsmonster-1990-2022/_attachment/inline/36aca4d1-db01-4972-8d92-a04ada959476:39249324c4ef352f3abb9c732f613abbf9f7eb66/RAPP2024-37.pdf

⁸ <https://lovdata.no/lov/2008-05-15-35/§53>

addition, stigma and shame connected to being a victim of domestic abuse may be an obstacle for the woman to apply for residency on these grounds.

In 2025, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) revised the interview template for applications under the abuse provision (the Immigration Act § 53 (1) (b)). Among other things, the template has clarified how sexual violence and reduced quality of life should be assessed.⁹ This is an encouraging, and Pro Sentret hopes that the revision will improve the situation for Thai marriage migrants who experience domestic violence from their Norwegian spouse.

⁹ UDI newsletter, winter 2025.