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Sex Work & Policy in the Netherlands

An analysis of sex work advocacy organizations' acceptability of sex work policy and their role in the policymaking process.

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Abstract

This thesis conducted semi-structured interviews with sex work advocacy organizations in the Netherlands. The aim is to find out the acceptability of these organizations towards the current sex work policy, the proposed Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs), and what their role is in the policymaking process. The thesis contains a literature review that is divided into two sections. The first section examines relevant literature on existing approaches to sex work policy and contextualizes how the Netherlands fits into these policy approaches. The second section provides an overview of relevant literature on concepts such as participatory policymaking, advocacy, and public acceptability. Following this, the thesis presents the findings of the interviews in the analysis. The analysis suggests that there is low acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations toward the current sex work policy and the Wrs. This is related to the existing stigmatization and a lack of normalization concerning sex work. The current sex work policy and the Wrs are considered to be increasingly restrictive, which hinders the ability of sex workers to work safely and weakens their position in society. Moreover, there is dissatisfaction with the lack of logic that is used in the policymaking process. Furthermore, the inclusion of sex work advocacy organizations in the policymaking process depends on several factors. Most importantly is the openness of other parties to listen to them and the willingness to act publicly. In light of these findings, recommendations are provided. These recommendations relate to the normalization of sex work and the creation of a sex work policy that is based on logic and is more uniform. Additionally, emphasis is placed on including relevant stakeholders and ensuring that policy is durable.

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List of Abbreviations

AP	Authoriteit Persoonsgegevens
Comensha	Coördinatiecentrum Mensenhandel
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
Wrs	Wet Regulering Sekswork
S.W.A.D.	Sekswork Alliantie Destigmatisering

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Current Sex Work Policy in the Netherlands

Sex work in the Netherlands is legal, and the government holds that people who choose to conduct sex work should be able to do so in a healthy and safe environment. It also states that sex work is not the same as extortion, forced prostitution, or human trafficking (Rijksoverheid 2021). Sex work can entail differing forms; for example, it may concern sex workers who work in closed businesses, such as brothels or clubs, or it may involve sex workers who conduct their work within their own homes (Comensha, n.d.).

Since 2000, sex work policy in the Netherlands has been decentralized and is based on a regulatory policy approach. The policy the government introduced then, which still applies today, is that voluntary sex work by adults is legal and that involuntary sex work and sex work by minors and illegal persons residing in the Netherlands should be combated. Sex work and its usage by clients were not punishable by law before the lift of the brothel ban. However, the idea was that by distinguishing between punishable and non-criminal forms of sex work, abuses and malpractices in the sector could be addressed (Raad van State 2020).

From 2000, sex work policy became regulated on a municipal level. This allowed municipalities to implement and monitor procedure within their area boundaries as long as it fell within the national policy. In practice, this means that a municipality can decide that all forms of sex work are subject to licensing, or they can only make certain forms of sex work subject to licensing. As a result, the sex work sector in the Netherlands is based on three possible outcomes. First is the presence of legal and licensed sex work. Second is the presence of legal and unlicensed sex work. And third is the presence of illegal sex work. Illegal sex work, depending on local sex work policy, can mean three things—first, unlicensed sex work or the illegal exploitation of sex work when a license is required. Second, exploitation of sex work with a license in which not all licensing requirements are met. And third, forms of sex work that are prohibited per the national law, such as sex work under 18 and human trafficking. Notably, this makes sex work policy complex (Comensha, n.d.).

Furthermore, in 2009 the Opting-in option was added to the Dutch sex work approach. The Opting-in was a reaction to the labor relations between sex business operators and sex

workers within the sector. Opting-in is an agreement between the tax authorities and sex work business operators. The agreement stipulates that the operator withholds the wage tax and premiums from the income of the sex worker and transfers them to the tax authorities. The sex worker receives a net salary and does not have to keep track of further administration (Den Dries, 2021).

However, the overall policy approach has not proved effective, as sex workers in the Netherlands still experience hardships due to discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion (den Dries 2021). Furthermore, there are still significant concerns about the extortion of sex workers, forced sex work, and human trafficking (Raad van State 2021). To tackle these issues, the Dutch government proposed a new policy initiative to prevent and address malpractices and abuses in the sex work industry, namely the Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs) (Rijksoverheid 2019).

1.1.2. The Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs)

Since the lift of the brothel ban in 2000, the government has been debating new sex work policy amendments. In 2007, an evaluation of the brothel ban took place. Based on this, the Bill Regulating Prostitution and Combating Abuses in the Sex Industry (Wrp) was proposed in November 2009. One of the initiatives proposed by the Wrp was mandatory registration for sex workers in a national register and an obligation for sex worker's clients to verify that the sex worker was registered in the national register. In 2013 the Upper House held a vote that requested that this stipulation be removed from the Wrp due to privacy issues. In 2014, the amended Wrp was submitted to the House of Representatives (Comensha, n.d.).

In 2017, the coalition parties that were governing agreed that all forms of sex work needed to be subject to licensing to create a uniform sex work policy that was easier to supervise, although it excluded sex work from home and escort services. Then in 2018, based on the initial Wrp, the amendment, and the 2017 coalition agreement, the Ministry of Justice and Safety decided to draw up a new policy initiative expected to be submitted in 2018 (Comensha, n.d.). Eventually, this led to the proposition of the new policy initiative (Wrs) by the Ministry of Justice and Safety in 2019 (Raad van State 2021).

The Wrs has already been included in the current government coalition agreement. However, it has yet to be adopted by the House of Representatives (NPO3, 2022). Given the preceding, the government's aim with the Wrs is to prevent or reduce abuses in the prostitution sector as

much as possible and to ensure that sex workers can do their work safely. In the proposition document of the Wrs, the government states that it has a duty of care to ensure safety in the sector and prevent abuses. For these reasons, they consider the Wrs necessary and appropriate. The act's core proposal is the introduction of a nationwide uniform licensing requirement for sex workers. This license requirement applies to self-employed sex workers and those who work for an operator. The license may be requested by a person of at least 21 years old with a legal residence and work status and a telephone that is only used for work purposes by the applicant. The license should be requested in person at a designated municipality and is valid for two years (Raad van State 2020).

In addition to the Wrs requiring a licensing obligation, it proposes that the license is registered in a national register that holds the applicant's social security number, work phone number, and licensing number (NPO3, 2022). The third proposition in the Wrs is that a sex worker must apply for the license by conducting a licensing interview with a designated municipality. This interview determines whether the sex worker is sufficiently self-reliant and not forced to do sex work. If a sex worker fails to apply for a license or is refused a license but continues to practice their profession, they will be punishable by law. The fourth proposition of the Wrs is that clients of an unlicensed sex worker will also be punishable by law, as well as operators who let an unlicensed sex worker work for them. The same goes for personnel who work with or for unlicensed sex workers, for example, chauffeurs or bodyguards. It should be mentioned that this specific proposal is currently under review by the government and might be amended. The fifth proposition of the Wrs entails that sex work may only be conducted from the age of 21 rather than 18, which is the current policy (Raad van State 2021).

However, this policy initiative has already been largely criticized by multiple stakeholders since it was introduced (Soaids 2021). The Council of State doubts that the licensing system for sex workers will make a positive contribution. Considering that the licensing requirement creates a high barrier to legally practicing sex work, it is likely that illegal sex work and, therefore, the risk of malpractices will increase. This makes the license counterproductive (Raad van State 2021).

The Dutch authority of personal data (AP) is an independent supervisory authority that monitors the fundamental rights of Dutch citizens. Their objection states that the processing of personal data of sex workers is prohibited unless the reasons for doing so are better substantiated. There is currently insufficient evidence that implementing the Wrs and

processing personal data leads to combating malpractices in the sex work industry. Additionally, the AP says that the Wrs will only be effective in fighting malpractices for self-reliant sex workers but will be unable to support sex workers who are not self-reliant. This means the policy will fail to address the most marginalized group while still having a considerable impact on their privacy (Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens 2020, 4).

In addition, the policy initiative has gained widespread attention from organizations. It has been proposed that the Wrs is harmful to the rights of sex workers in the Netherlands. This is because it displays a perspective that victimizes sex workers and views sex work as an inherently exploitative profession (Proud 2019). Aside from this, due to the increased chance of sex workers practicing their work illegally and thus going underground, the barrier to asking for help from law enforcement or health service providers increases further. This will make it more difficult for sex workers to report malpractices and abuses in the sex industry (Red Insight 2020). There are also fears that raising the minimum age from 18 to 21 will increase illegal sex work. As a result, sex workers between 18 and 21 will not be able to register themselves, likely leading to this group practicing sex work illegally (Soa Aids Nederland 2021b).

Sex work advocacy organizations emphasized their concern about the problematic nature of creating sex work legislation without sufficiently including insights from those affected. Multiple advocacy organizations have urged the government to rethink the Wrs and work towards creating a more effective policy in collaboration with sex workers and advocacy organizations (Soa Aids Nederland 2021; Humanitas n.d.; Save n.d.; Red Insight 2020). Aside from this, sex work advocacy organizations have voiced the need to be included in the policymaking process to create effective and fair policy (Soa Aids Nederland 2021a; Regioplan 2020; Wagenaar et al. 2017). Policy participation by sex workers and sex work advocacy organizations is vital for formulating and implementing sex work policy (Regioplan 2020, 32). The inclusion of sex work advocacy organizations allows for the creation of collaborative governance. This results in policy that is more realistic, effective, and fair (Wagenaar et al. 2017, 24).

Moreover, including sex workers and advocacy organizations in decision-making about policy that directly affects them increases their visibility in the public debate. This can contribute to the de-stigmatization of sex work (Regioplan 2020, 34). Furthermore, advocacy is an effective method for organizations to convince leading actors in their environment to

accept and support their policy positions, thereby increasing access to resources and acceptance of their moral point of view (Mosley 2019, 58).

1.2. Questions and Objectives

Sex work policy in the Netherlands is a relevant area to research. The Dutch legal context of sex work and its policymaking is interesting and complex. The government has put significant effort into designing a new legislature since 2007. This eventually led to the Wrs being submitted in 2019. Yet, no significant national policy interventions have occurred since the brothel ban in 2000. Moreover, with the ensuing controversy surrounding sex work policy and the proposed Wrs alongside sex work advocacy organizations wanting to be heard increasingly complicates the situation. Consequently, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

What is the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy in the Netherlands, and what is their role in the policymaking process?

This research question will be answered through four sub-questions, namely:

- 1. What is the acceptability of advocacy organizations toward the existing sex work policy in the Netherlands?*
- 2. What is the acceptability of advocacy organizations toward the proposed Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs)?*
- 3. To what extent are advocacy organizations involved in the policy (or decision) making process?*
- 4. What necessary changes do advocacy organizations perceive necessary concerning the Dutch sex work policy?*

The decision to write about public acceptability, participatory policymaking, and advocacy concerning sex work advocacy organizations is because it has not been widely studied in academia. Yet, it remains a highly relevant topic. Sex work advocacy organizations actively demand more awareness be paid to sex worker stigmatization, exclusion, and safety (Soa Aids 2021a). Moreover, the government recognizes that issues exist in the sex work sector and has actively been trying to push through a new legislature (Rijksoverheid 2019).

However, it seems that sex work advocacy organizations and the government do not agree on the correct policy approach to tackle the challenges occurring in the sex work sector (Rijksoverheid 2019; Soa Aids 2021b). Yet, research on effective policymaking points out

that including citizens in the policymaking process is vital for creating effective and durable policy (Wagenaar et al. 2017, 24).

It should also be noted that few academic reports specifically focus on sex work advocacy organizations' acceptability of sex work policy and their role in policymaking. Information that has been published about these themes mainly comes from sex work advocacy organizations themselves. However, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic literature on this topic by analyzing the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex policy and their role in the policymaking process. To identify key factors that should be highlighted in the research, the literature review will analyze different approaches toward sex work policy and provide an overview of aspects relating to participatory policymaking, advocacy, and public acceptability. Furthermore, interviews with sex work advocacy organizations will be conducted to map their perspectives and answer the research questions. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that the perspective of sex work advocacy organizations on sex work policy is included.

1.3. Relevance

1.3.1. Social Relevance

Sex workers in the Netherlands are often regarded as victims rather than people with a legal profession. One reason for this rhetoric is that sex work is linked to human trafficking, leading to the general societal stigmatization of anyone who offers paid sexual services. The stigmatization of sex workers makes them vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. For example, they have reduced access to care, law enforcement, and essential services such as mortgages or bank accounts (Soa Aids Nederland 2021). Moreover, the stigmatization of sex workers may lead to them experiencing adverse treatment from others, such as family, friends, and third parties. This stigmatization also leads to a one-sided policy approach (Soa Aids Nederland 2021). Further understanding the role that policy plays in the hardships that sex workers experience while conducting their profession could prove crucial for the further empowerment of sex workers.

1.3.2. Political Relevance

According to the government, the current sex work policy has not effectively countered malpractices and abuses in the sex work sector. So, they put forth the Wrs to prevent, identify and combat malpractices in the sector (Raad van State 2021). However, different stakeholders

have concerns about its effectiveness. Therefore, gaining better insight into the acceptability of the sex worker advocacy organizations and understanding their role in the policymaking process is key to creating a more effective policy approach.

1.3.3. Academic Relevance

Academic research on sex work policy in the Netherlands does not extensively center on the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations on sex work policy. Also, it does not broadly explain their role in the policymaking process. Since sex work advocacy organizations are closely connected to the sex work sector and have access to information that other stakeholders may not, more research must be done to understand their perspectives better. This thesis attempts to contribute to this.

1.4. Overview

The following chapters will work toward answering the research question. The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter two provides a literature review of academic literature in the field and has two aims. First, to give an overview of existing approaches toward sex work policy and contextualize where Dutch sex work policy fits in. Second, to examine the concepts of participative policymaking, advocacy, and public acceptability. The purpose is to determine the implications of these practices so that they may be related to the case of sex work advocacy organizations. Chapter three focuses on the methodology used in the analysis. This chapter describes how the interview sample was selected, how the data was collected, and which methods were used to analyze the data. Additionally, the methodology will consider specific ethical concerns and limitations. Chapter four presents the findings and provides an analysis of the collected data. Chapter five provides a conclusion and discussion of the results. The final chapter will focus on policy recommendations that came forth out of this research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will consist of two sections. The first section of the literature review will explore and unpack the types of sex work policy approaches. These include criminalization, decriminalization, legalization, and the Nordic model. It will also provide an overview of the debate surrounding the effectiveness of these policy approaches by considering different attitudes towards them. The second section will examine relevant literature on participatory policymaking, advocacy, and public acceptability. The section seeks to identify and understand key terms connected to these practices and links them to government and citizen perspectives. Overall, identifying the implications of these terms is necessary to understand the acceptability of sex work policy by sex work advocacy organizations and find out their role in the policymaking process. Both of these sections rely on older and more recent academic literature, government documents, and research reports by the sex work advocacy organizations or that have been conducted at the government's request.

2.1.1. Definition of Sex Work

Sex workers are adults who receive money or goods in exchange for consensual sexual services or erotic performances, either regularly or occasionally (Open Society Foundation 2019). The term was coined in the 1970s by Carol Leigh, an American sex worker (Stella 2013, 3). The term sex worker was developed to unite sex workers of all genders and forms of sex work. Moreover, it has the intention of recognizing sex work as work. It was meant to separate from the term prostitute. The term prostitute is still often used to refer to sex work. Especially when discussing historical aspects of the profession and in legislation (Stella 2013, 3). The term prostitute is increasingly deemed demeaning and stigmatizing, which contributes to sex workers' exclusion from health, legal and social services (Open Society Foundation 2019).

Language use is vital to consider when discussing sex work because how sex is discussed communicates meaning and influences how people understand sex work and create policy for it. The language used to describe sex work, and sex workers differ across and within different sex work sectors. This is connected to various reasons: differences in sex workers' histories, regional specificities, and how they self-identify (Stella 2013, 1).

The language used to discuss sex work is directly related to how the profession is framed, often based on simplistic or stereotypical ideas. These types of framing do not consider the complexity of sex workers' realities. They usually only consider 'good' or 'bad,' 'forced' or 'chosen,' and 'glamorized' or 'exploitative.' As a result, the type of language that sex workers use to refer to themselves might be based on balancing self-identification, their desire to represent their diversity, and the importance of breaking through stereotypes and binary categories. This also means their use of language may change depending on who they are talking to and in which context. Sex workers may honor each person's language to self-identify (Stella 2013, 1). This means sex workers may refer to themselves as a prostitute but recognize the negative connotations of outsiders using the term. This is because sex workers often reject the term based on how the public perceives it rather than any inherent shame in the word itself (Stella 2013, 3). Thus, it should be noted that sex workers may refer to themselves with any language they deem appropriate based on their connotation (Proud 2013).

In Dutch law, sex work is often referred to as prostitution. Prostitution is defined as 'making oneself available to perform sexual acts with another for payment' (Comensha n.d., 3). When discussing the sex work sector in the Dutch policy context, there are several forms of sex work to consider. The following forms of sex work are distinguished:

1. Window sex work: sex workers recruit clients from behind a window. This is a form of sex work with a high degree of independence but can only be found in a limited number of municipalities.
2. Private sex work: sex work in brothels, clubs, private houses, sauna clubs, and some massage parlors. Both entire service sex companies and non-full-service sex companies (or other activities, e.g., massage salons, sauna clubs). These clubs are decreasing as they are no longer perceived as profitable due to aging entrepreneurs and a lack of takeover possibilities.
3. Escort: a sex worker is linked to a client via an escort service, or there is an independently working sex worker who advertises via the internet/social media. Many municipalities require permits for escort businesses.

4. Sex worker working at home: sex work from one's own home. Not easy to gain insight into this form of sex work. Therefore, it is an important sector to gain insights into illegal/unlicensed sex work.
5. Street/walking sex work: sex workers recruit clients on the street. There are usually several legal spots (streetwalking zones). However, most municipalities do not allow this form of sex work due to local regulations.
6. Other: other places that serve as a cover for sex work: include nail salons, tea houses, unlicensed massage parlors, hotel prostitution, hairdressing salons, tanning salons, and swingers' clubs (Comensha n.d., 3).

2.2. Sex Work Policy

Mathieson et al. (2015) explain the different interpretations of sex work. Sex work discourse is connected to determining whether the profession is exploitative, empowering, or a consequence of immorality. As a result, there are three main perspectives on sex work. The first considers sex work as a consequence of deficient moral character. This perspective is related to patriarchal and religious traditions that connect female sexuality with temptation and male sexuality with dominance and sanctioned instability. The second perspective, the "sex work" position, asserts that sex work is a valid form of labor and argues that it is not inherently harmful to women. It considers that women have a right to decide what they will do with their bodies. It views sex work as a practice that is oppressive for some but is lucrative and empowering for others. The third position asserts that sex work results from social, political, and economic inequality. It argues that women are predominantly conscripted into prostitution because of their social vulnerability. Political regulation of sex work varies according to each nation's underlying economic and social justice commitments. As a result of these differencing perspectives on sex work, varying policy approaches exist towards sex work. Namely, criminalization, decriminalization, legalization, and the Nordic model (Mathieson et al. 2015, 367-368).

The following sections of this literature review will focus more on these different policy approaches. Additionally, it aims to contextualize Dutch sex work policy and understand how it is similar to or differs from these policy approaches. It is essential to understand these three approaches to know where the Dutch policy on sex work fits in.

2.2.1 Criminalization

The first approach toward sex work policy is that of criminalization. In their research on sex work policy systems, Joulaei et al. (2021) look into the responses of different societies and cultures to the criminalization, decriminalization, and legalization of sex work. The criminalization approach is a form in which the buying, selling, or brokering of sex is criminalized. The brokering of sex refers to situations in which there is pimping or brothel-keeping (Joulaei et al. 2021, 2). Criminalization policies are implemented based on the idea that making sex work illegal drives individuals away from selling or buying sex, thereby eliminating the need for a sex work sector (Östergren 2017, 24). One value that underlies criminalization policy is a relatively traditional sexual morality that regards commercial sex as abnormal or immoral (Abel 2014, 587).

The criminalization of sex work can be subdivided into two groups: prohibitionist and abolitionist. Prohibitionist is a form in which all forms of prostitution are unacceptable and thus illegal. This approach is taken in most states of the USA. Abolitionism is a form of prohibition which allows for the sale of sex but bans all related activities. These activities refer to matters such as soliciting, brothel-keeping, and procurement (Mossman 2007, 5).

Though criminalization of sex work occurs in many countries, academia has increasingly criticized it. The main argument against criminalization is that it will drive sex work underground, making the industry less visible and more difficult to monitor (Gould 2001, 445). Criminalization often leads to increased exposure of sex workers to violence and abuse. One of the reasons for this is that the fear of being punishable (by law) and the ensuing repercussions of prosecution will cause people to refrain from reporting instances of violence, abuse, or misconduct (Östergren 2017, 24).

On the other hand, there are also arguments for the criminalization of sex work. Certain studies found that the legalization or decriminalization of sex work did not decrease the prevalence of illegal sex work, for example, in Austria (European Parliament 2005, 107). A study by Jakobsson & Kotsadam (2010) also suggested that human trafficking for sexual exploitation is most prevalent in countries where prostitution is legalized and least prevalent in countries where prostitution is illegal. According to the authors, these results suggest that (partially) criminalizing sex work practices may reduce human trafficking in countries (Jakobsson & Kotsadam 2010, 1).

2.2.2. Decriminalization

There are two types of decriminalization of sex work. Firstly, full decriminalization refers to eliminating all laws and penalties that criminalize any part of commercial sex. Partial decriminalization refers to the decriminalization of selling sex while criminalizing its purchase. In this sense, criminal responsibility lies with those who purchase sex, act as a pimp, or hold brothels and other sex establishments (Joulai et al. 2021, 3)

New Zealand was the first country to implement full decriminalization of sex work. They implemented the Prostitution Reform Act in 2003 based on the political values of self-determination, equality, and inclusion (Regioplan 2020, 3). Considering sex work is a marginalized occupation, decriminalizing it is crucial to lessen the stigma associated with the industry (Schmidt 2017, 35). Decriminalizing sex work also increases protection against discrimination and violence. This is because it increases access to law enforcement and support agencies (Joulai et al., 2021, 3). Decriminalization also allows for collaboration between sex workers and the government, which contributes to addressing health and safety issues (Mathieson et al. 2016, 383). Abel and Fitzgerald (2010) studied the effects of decriminalization in New Zealand. Sex workers also reported that decriminalization and the realization of employment, legal, health, and safety rights had provided them with legitimacy that countered stigmatization. However, their study also suggested that the media continued using negative stereotypes of sex workers, which contributed to the ongoing experiences of stigmatization (Abel & Fitzgerald 2010, 256).

The three approaches showcase that creating effective policies is vital to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of sex workers (Open Society Foundations 2012, 1). In a more recent study, Abel (2018) reflects on the problem with sex work policies. She states that policy aims to achieve a given purpose but does not always have the intended effect. This usually occurs when those affected by the policies are not sufficiently consulted in its creation. A vital part of good policy is that it has to be effective, which can be achieved by including stakeholders. According to Abel, sex workers were actively involved in creating the 2003 Prostitution Reform Act (Abel 2018, 1926).

This is also true of the sex work policy in the Netherlands. Stakeholders and researchers have pointed out the need for a form of policy that addresses the malpractices and abuses in the sex industry (Raad van State 2021; Authoriteit Persoonsgegevens 2020; Rijnink & van Wijk 2020; 2020; Regioplan 2020). However, to create good policy, including actual sex

workers and advocacy organizations is necessary (Soa Aids Nederland 2021; Humanitas n.d.; Save n.d.; Red Insight 2020).

2.2.3. Legalization

The third policy approach is the full legalization of sex work. This means there is a legal market for commercial sex with restrictions on licensing, operation, and management of brothels, soliciting for sex work, and living from the proceeds of a person conducting sex work. All other sex establishments would also be under regulation (Joulai et al. 2013, 4). This approach sees sex workers as part of society that should be regulated. Moreover, it is meant to control diseases, violence, assaults, and other forms of (social) misconduct. Legalizing sex work is based on the idea that identifying violence, threats, and abuse is easier in conditions where people are not forced to work secretly (Joulai et al. 2013, 4). Legalizing sex work does not mean that criminal activities in the sex industry are not regulated. It criminalizes engagement in any type of coercion or deception in recruitment or the conditions of work and any attempt to recruit, employ or buy sexual services from a person under 18 (Weitzer 2017, 368). Legalization is based on the idea that it will reduce criminal activities, malpractices, and victimization of sex workers, but only if the regulations provide for robust oversight and monitoring of the trade. Moreover, the regulations must be systematically enforced (Weitzer 2017, 369).

Begum et al. (2013) studied the effects of legalization on sex work in Victoria, Australia. The results were similar to those of full decriminalization in New Zealand (Abel & Fitzgerald 2010, 256). They found that legalization generally improved the work-life of sex workers. However, it did not significantly decrease the stigmatization of sex workers. The existing stigma formed a barrier for sex workers to either move out of the industry or live authentically among family and friends (Begum et al. 2013, 97). Stigma is also the main barrier to improving the position of sex workers in Dutch society (Reimagining Sex Work 2022). Advocacy organizations emphasize that the media should form an essential ally in raising awareness while also recognizing sexual freedom. Media coverage should be less based on stereotypes, and sex work should be portrayed more nuancedly (Reimagining Sex Work 2022).

2.2.4. The Nordic Model and the European Union

A specific policy approach to sex work and human trafficking was put forth in Sweden as the Sex Purchase Act in 1999. It is known as the Nordic model or may be referred to as the Swedish model of sex work (Vuolajärvi 2018, 152). The Sex Purchase Act made purchasing sex a criminal offense. It was meant to impede those who purchase sexual services, thereby decreasing the number of people who buy such services (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 425). The introduction of the act was based on three central claims. First, the Swedish government considered prostitution to cause serious harm to individuals and society. Implementing such an act should make it more difficult for people in different countries to establish more organized prostitution activities in Sweden. Second, the government felt that the existence of prostitution weakened women's societal position. Third, the implementation of this policy was meant to send out an international message that prostitution was not a desirable phenomenon. The act also aimed to set a global precedent by sending out the message of Sweden's views toward prostitution being an undesirable phenomenon that did not adhere to gender equality (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 425).

The idea behind client criminalization is to abolish commercial sex by shifting the focus from sellers to (male) perpetrators: clients, traffickers, and pimps (Vuolajärvi 2018, 152). Client criminalization was a consequence of both welfare state ideology and feminist ideology. Namely, commercial sex goes against the ideals of the welfare state and is a consequence of male domination. Moreover, feminist ideology centered the debate around commercial sex being harmful to women based on gender. This ideology is often used during international political discussions on client criminalization (Vuolajärvi 2018, 153).

The Nordic model is advocated as a humanitarian, "women-friendly" way of solving the problems in the sex work sector. Different adaptations of the Nordic model were later adopted by Iceland, Norway, Finland, South Korea, North Ireland, France, Great Britain, and Scotland (Mathieson et al. 2015, 427). However, the Nordic model is implemented differently across these countries because it operates in varying societal and legal contexts (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 427).

The European Union

A report on the Nordic model was also put forth by the European Union (EU) Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in 2013 (Outshoorn 2017, 371). The report framed prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls as violent. It presented prostitution as

a cause and outcome of gender inequality and suggested it violated human dignity. The report also mentions the other policy approaches to sex work and deems them inadequate. It states that the ‘regulationist’ approach in Germany and the Netherlands is ineffective and that the Nordic model would effectively reduce prostitution and trafficking. In response to this report, several resolutions on prostitution were put forth by the European Parliament in 2014 so that national governments would review their legislation. These resolutions included the following:

- Calls on member states to introduce health checks and counseling for prostitutes.
- Reduce the dangers of street prostitution
- Pay attention to the prostitution of minors and “grooming.”
- Refrain from criminalizing prostitutes and developing exit programs
- Give police and authorities the right to enter premises where prostitution takes place
- Develop social services for prostitutes
- Reduce prostitution as it undermines women’s fundamental rights
- Finally, the resolution stresses the effectiveness of the Nordic model on prostitution in combating trafficking and purchasing sex (Outshoorn 2017, 372).

The resolution was eventually passed with 53% in favor, 24% against, and 18% abstaining (Outshoorn 2017, 372). Although the resolution was passed, there was strong opposition against the report outside the EP. Approximately 500 NGOs and 90 academic experts criticized the report for its “ideological bias” and lack of evidence. It called on the EP to reject the report and resolution and stated that the criminalization of clients has not effectively reduced prostitution. Instead, they argued it had led to the increasing vulnerability of sex workers, including in the area of public health (Outshoorn 2017, 372). The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe also criticized the report for the inaccurate data and ignoring sex workers’ voices. They also named the adoption of the resolution and thus the lack of listening to actual sex workers a “disheartening failure in democracy” (Outshoorn 2017, 373).

A study by Vuolajärvi (2018) was conducted on the effectiveness of the Nordic model. The study found that there was a tension between the feminist-humanitarian aims of the model. This means that, on the one hand, the model was meant to protect and save women. While in practice, the governance of commercial sex under the Nordic model led to increased control or deportations. Generally, it made the living and working conditions of these women more

difficult (Vuolajärvi 2018, 151).

First, criminalizing clients made (women) sex workers feel less safe due to the client's nervousness about being caught. This resulted, for example, in clients not wanting to call from their numbers and wanting to carry out the transaction further away from the street area. This meant that women needed to spend more time with clients and go to unfamiliar environments that were more unsafe for them than, for example, receiving clients in their apartments. In a way, it made sex workers feel like the act switched the power roles. Sex workers now had to worry about making the client feel safe rather than the other way around. Moreover, it increases stigma and reinforces the 'victim image' of sex workers (Vuolajärvi 2018, 157). Additionally, implementing the Nordic model without providing sufficient welfare services and access to labor rights can lead to significant problems, especially for migrants engaged in commercial sex (Vuolajärvi 2018, 158).

Another study by Kingston & Thomas (2018) stated that the Nordic model was not adequate and that the model did not reduce demand for commercial sex, nor did it reduce sex trafficking, violence, or exploitation. Instead, it exacerbated such issues. Also, the policy approach did not contribute to gender equality because the evidence for the approach does not consider research that shows that women and couples also pay for sex and trans people also sell sexual services (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 435).

2.2.5. Contextualizing the Netherlands

Sex work policy in the Netherlands, since the lift of the brothel ban in 2000, has characteristics of multiple policy approaches. In essence, it currently relates to the legalization approach considering there is a legal market for commercial sex with restrictions on licensing, operation, and management of brothels and soliciting for sex work (Raad van State 2020; Comensha, n.d.). There are restrictions on licensing based on the different attitudes that municipalities have towards sex work within their boundaries. Consequently, municipalities can also restrict the operation and management of brothels, for example, by denying more than a certain number of licenses to be granted within their area (Comensha, n.d.). A municipality can also restrict soliciting for sex work within their area boundaries. For example, by implementing a designated place where sex workers may legally solicit their services in streetwalking zones, it would be illegal to solicit their services on the street outside of these zones (Hulshof and Flight 2008, 12).

The brothel ban was lifted to better control and regulate the sex work sector.

Specifically, the administrative approach granted municipalities more responsibility and the criminal approach that criminalized human trafficking (Raad van State 2020). However, Weitzer (2017) emphasizes that legalization only reduces illegal activities, malpractices, and victimization of sex workers if regulations provide for robust oversight and monitoring in the sector and regulations are systematically enforced (Weitzer 2017, 369).

Yet, when examining the Dutch context, it becomes apparent that these conditions are not fully met. In terms of oversight and monitoring, there is unclarity and disagreement about the size and nature of the actual sex work sector and the abuses and malpractices that occur within it (Raad van State 2020). The Scientific Research and Documentation Center (WODC) states that the number of licensed sex businesses in the Netherlands fell from 1127 in 2006 to 674 in 2014. Yet, there is little insight into the number of unlicensed sex workers who, for example, work for an operator. This means that the government has little insight into the actual size of the sex work sector (Daalder 2014, 18). Numerous studies have also been conducted into the scope and nature of abuses in the sex work sector, specifically focusing on the percentage of people forced to conduct sex work. The numbers ranged from 4% to 85%, which makes it clear that there is no consensus on the number of abuses in the sector. The differences in these numbers are related to the complex nature of the sex work sector and the sex work policy in the Netherlands. For example, the lack of visibility into the number of unlicensed sex workers, a low willingness of sex workers to report crimes among victims, and the use of different definitions and methodological problems (Raad van State 2020). There is a low willingness of sex workers to report abuses or malpractices because of a fear of stigma, discrimination, privacy violations, and legal and financial consequences due to the lack of documentation (Kennis et al. 2021, 10).

However, the Dutch sex work policy also holds characteristics connected to the EU interpretation of the Nordic model. These are mainly related to the creation of social services. The Netherlands offers sex work exit programs (RUPS) to any sex worker who may want to change their profession. It concerned a subsidy scheme to enable the development and implementation of exit programs (Timmermans et al. 2019, 2).

Timmermans et al. (2019) evaluated the national coverage of the exit programs. Exit programs are usually set up on a municipal base and generally aim at work/daytime activities outside the sex work sector, which is a precondition of participating in an exit program. The exit programs address numerous aspects of a person's life. For example, attention is often paid to problems related to a person's social network, (potential) debts, education/training,

housing, income, and psychological health. They are usually not aimed at a specific gender target group or sex workers in a particular sex work sector. Their study stated that according to the implementers involved the supply is often insufficiently capable of reaching male sex workers, home workers, illegal sex workers, transgender sex workers, and victims of sexual exploitation in particular (Timmermans et al. 2019, 2).

Additionally, the proposed Wrs move further away from the legalization approach. Firstly, the Wrs states that all sex workers may be criminalized if they are unwilling to register themselves or are not granted a license by the designated municipality (Rottier 2020).

Secondly, due to the criminalization of clients who purchase services from illegal sex workers (Raad van State 2020). It should be considered here that there is still a difference since the Nordic model is based on criminalizing all clients, not only those who purchase services from illegal sex workers (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 425).

The drive to move away from the legalization approach and towards the Nordic model is mainly due to the efforts of the ChristenUnie (NPORadio1 20220; ChristenUnie, n.d.). The ChristenUnie is a Dutch Christian political party with socially and ecologically progressive and ethically more conservative positions (Parlement, n.d.). In March 2021, elections took place in the Netherlands, and coalition discussions took place for almost 300 days. The ChristenUnie was considered a viable participant in the coalition. However, the ChristenUnie also said the adoption of the Wrs was a vital condition for them to join the government coalition (NPORadio1 2022).

The ChristenUnie considers sex work to be unequal as the party perceives there to usually be inequality of power, economic inequality, and gender inequality. The party is against sex work and thus wants to opt for a policy that causes as few victims as possible. They consider correctly investigating and prosecuting all those who are guilty of coercion or exploitation or sponsoring those who are guilty essential. The party sees policy as an important tool for this. First by stopping the legalization of sex work and second by adopting the 'Nordic model' and criminalizing clients and operators. The party also considers exit programs to be a structural proposition of sex work policy and wants to increase subsidies for exit programs and continue to focus on providing aid to find housing, work, education, debt aid, and get victims out of the hands of exploiters (ChristenUnie, n.d.).

It should be noted that the study by Kingston and Thomas (2018) pointed out that implementation of the Nordic approach did not contribute to gender equality because the

evidence for the approach does not consider research that shows that women and couples also pay for sex and trans people also sell sexual services (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 435).

This first section of the literature review analyzed the most common sex work policy approaches. The main aim was to understand the implications of these policy approaches better and examine where the Dutch case fits in. It became clear that the current Dutch system is most related to the legalization approach. However, according to the literature, vital aspects of the legalization approach are not being met. Moreover, it became clear that the Netherlands, backed by the ChristenUnie, is heading more toward the Nordic approach. However, the question remains if policymakers sufficiently include those whom the policy is meant to affect, namely the sex workers. Numerous sex work advocacy organizations expressed this was not the case (Soa Aids Nederland 2021; Regioplan 2020; Wagenaar et al. 2017).

2.3. Participatory Policymaking

The following section of this literature review will provide an overview of participatory policymaking, advocacy, and public acceptability. The purpose will be to identify critical factors that should be considered throughout the analysis of this study. The study aims to understand sex work advocacy organizations' acceptability of the current policy and the proposed Wrs and learn more about their role in policymaking.

Participatory policymaking involves citizens who may participate on-site or online for different periods. Citizens may be individuals or representatives of organizations (Bobbio 2019, 47). Participation is often an overarching concept that describes activities through which people's concerns, needs, interests, and values are included in decisions and actions on public matters and issues (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 14). It may also refer to citizen engagement – or voice and accountability in decision making. This is relevant as it furthers the goal of reaching an inclusive society (Kumagai & Iori 2020, 1). In policy design, public participation is seen as an instrument that policymakers can use for policymaking (Bobbio 2019, 41).

Governments may be interested in participatory policymaking as a way to improve decision-making. It includes the conscious and deliberate effort that involves acquiring knowledge about the effectiveness of policy initiatives and analyzing their relevance to socio-economic transformations (de Smedt & Borch 2021, 52). The practice of participatory policymaking is

gaining foot due to the increasing attention paid to failures of representative democracy, namely that it does not include citizens enough. However, the practice is not yet widespread. This is partly because governments are not always keen on including citizens in decision-making (Bobbio 2019, 42). The push for this participatory process can be from top to bottom: i.e., a government initiating participatory approaches to policymaking; or bottom-up, i.e., certain stakeholders seeking to influence a specific policy (de Smedt & Borch 2021, 52).

2.3.1. Participatory Policymaking for Governments

For governments, participatory policymaking can be viewed as allowing individuals or groups to participate in policy design through advisory or participatory means to increase accountability, transparency, and active involvement (de Smedt & Borch 2021, 52).

According to Saguin & Cashore (2022), the reasons why a government may apply participatory policymaking may be related either to the “logic of consequences” or to the “logic of appropriateness.” The logic of consequences relates to the ability to bring forth knowledge that might not be said out loud or may not be generally known to policymakers. Thus, finding out what this knowledge entails through participatory policymaking can improve the rationality of policy interventions (Saguin & Cashore 2022, 2).

The logic of appropriateness relates to generating legitimacy for the policy or authoritative arena that develops and implements policy interventions. This logic is based on two ideas. First, citizens, regardless of the effects, should be included in the policymaking process, considering they are directly affected by the policy. Second, that participatory policymaking allows for legitimacy creation from a government perspective (Saguin & Cashore 2022, 2). A government’s ability to provide a durable solution to problems requires support from stakeholders and broader civil society. If this is not the case, the government’s problem-solving approaches might not last long or never work. This is caused by these groups viewing the policy as illegitimate. A lack of legitimacy might exacerbate the problem (Saguin & Cashore 2022, 8).

Bobbio (2019) explains that policymakers may decide to include participatory policymaking when they need resources that are challenging to obtain. In this sense, participation is both a cognitive and political resource. Cognitive in the sense that resources provide information, practical knowledge, and insights that citizens possess and may transfer to policymakers, resulting in wiser and more suitable problem definitions or policy formulations. The political resource is more related to the consensus/legitimacy that policymakers can acquire due to

citizen involvement. It may help them avoid conflict, reduce the public's disaffection and increase the co-production of policies or the cooperation of the users during the implementation stage (Bobbio 2019, 42).

Based on the study by Saguin & Cashore (2022), it is clear that gaining legitimacy is essential for governments. This is also the case of the Wrs. During an interview in April 2022, a ChristenUnie spokesperson conducted an interview advocating for the Wrs. During the interview, the spokesperson explained that the party aims to fight for women's rights who are conducting sex work against their will. She speaks about her discussions with mayors of large cities in the Netherlands and how these mayors continuously request a more uniform sex work policy. This means that the multiple mayor's requests for a more uniform policy are used to legitimize the Wrs (NPORadio1 2022).

2.3.2. Participatory Policymaking for Citizens

For citizens, participatory policymaking allows for empowerment. It will enable all groups to participate and hold their governments accountable (Kumagai & Iori 2020, 1). This is related to trust, as governments and public institutions have a fundamental role in supporting an inclusive society. Therefore, citizen trust in these institutions, also called political trust, is vital for representative democracy (Kumagai & Iori 2020, 1).

Trust in the government, and citizen engagement are mutually reinforcing, interdependent dynamics in the policymaking process. This means that, on the one hand, citizen engagement allows citizens to interact in the policymaking process and provides them with a stake in decision-making. It provides governments with the possibility to gain legitimacy through trust. However, it is necessary to consider that the context in which citizen engagement takes place affects the levels of trust in the government. This is because different contexts have different norms, cultures, and rules. Moreover, different contexts have facilitated other environments that allow for citizen engagement. For example, access to information, freedom of expression, and anti-corruption laws (Kumagai & Iori 2020, 15).

Furthermore, citizen engagement enhances transparency and accountability. Dialogue between governments and citizens increases accountability in resource management and mobilization. Also, through citizen participation, public accountability has increased transparency and government responsiveness (Kumagai & Iori 2020, 19).

Citizen engagement in the Dutch context: the Tilburg model

Citizen engagement can also be found concerning the Dutch sex work policy. An example is a collaboration between Seksworks and the municipality of Tilburg. Seksworks is a focus group founded by (ex) sex workers in collaboration with the municipality of Tilburg. The focus group is regularly asked to provide feedback on the sex work policy of various municipalities (Seksworks n.d.). The municipality strived for a safe sex work sector. However, there was still unclarity about when the national sex work policy would be adopted. For this reason, the municipality aimed to create a policy that strengthens the position of legal sex workers and combats human trafficking and violence in the sex work sector in close collaboration with Seksworks. This policy formulation began in 2019 (Overheid.nl, n.d.). The municipality considered this focus group important as sex work policy could be presented to those who work in the sector, and their opinion could be considered. This resulted in a new municipal sex work policy being implemented in January 2020 (Overheid.nl, n.d.).

The policy had four key goals. First is strengthening the financial and social position of sex workers. This should be achieved, firstly, by fighting the stigmatization of sex workers. For example, by providing better access to housing, insurance, mortgages, and other loans.

Secondly, by investigating the possibility of allocating good, safe, and healthy workplaces available to sex workers within the municipality. Thirdly, by increasing the accessibility and quality of healthcare. The second goal is combating malpractices and violence in the sector. This should be achieved by setting up an integrated approach that addresses human trafficking in close coordination with the care coordinator for Human Trafficking (*zorgcoordinator Mensenhandel*). The policy note states that abuses can occur in licensed and unlicensed sectors. Within the licensed sector, the aim will be to ensure that operators become more responsible for preventing and reporting abuses to the police.

The third key goal is to achieve a well-organized and licensed sector. This should be achieved by enforcing an operating license which allows the municipality to maintain and improve their grip on the licensed sector. However, the municipality does stipulate that to implement a licensing requirement; the municipality must provide workplaces for the licensed sector. For this reason, the municipality did not set a maximum number of licenses that they were willing to give out. Instead, they test each application under the local policy. The local policy states that a license can be granted if the zoning plan permits a sex work establishment. If the intention is that alcohol is also served in this establishment, the zoning plan must also allow catering. An operating license for a location-related sex establishment is granted for

three years. An operating license for a non-location-bound sex establishment, for example, escorts, will be granted for one year. There are specific assessment criteria for the licensing application. However, the basic principle is that possible nuisance to the residential function is prevented as much as possible.

The fourth key goal is the protection of the general public housing- and living climate. This means that the licensing of sex businesses should not be at the expense of the safety and attractiveness of districts and neighborhoods. In line with this, sex work businesses that create nuisance will be addressed and might not receive new licenses. Additionally, a concentration of sex establishments is prevented by a distance criterion. This criterion entails that establishing a new sex work business is impossible within a radius of 250 meters of an existing business, a school, a daycare, or a building for public worship (Overheid.nl, n.d.).

2.3.3. Risks of Participatory Policymaking

Though there is a need for increased participatory policymaking from a government and citizen perspective, it is not necessarily a clear-cut matter. Different knowledge claims might compete, and their legitimacy and validity must be negotiated in the policy design process. Moreover, the participatory process may create conflict between stakeholder groups by expressing opposing views and exposing underlying tensions.

Another matter to consider is who should be included. We talk about citizens being included, but it is impossible to include all citizens. Failing to include a particular group that believes they should have been consulted might lead to conflict or opposition. Thus, when incorporating participatory policymaking, it is necessary to do so carefully and cautiously (de Smedt and Borch 2021, 52). In addition to avoiding conflict or opposition, considering the breadth of citizens and stakeholders that should be engaged is vital to creating legitimate, robust, and relevant results. This is also important because they affect the acceptance of a policy initiative throughout the implementation phase (Stratigea 2013, 145).

Another point often brought forward by stakeholders, political opponents, or activists is that participatory policymaking may have negative consequences as it seems to give citizens a voice when it might only be used as a tool to legitimize decisions made by the government. For example, policymakers may show false openness or manipulate citizens' goodwill. Governments might seem open to new solutions put forth by citizens while primarily aiming to have citizens confirm the solutions they made prior. Claims of this nature may also be made based on the strategy of political opponents who want to discredit other groups' claims

or sometimes by the media who might want to counter the government (Bobbio 2019, 52). Thus, the government's tendency to view participatory policymaking as a way to gain trust is something to be cautious of (de Smedt & Borch 2021, 53). Similarly, governments may regard participatory policymaking as a way to gain trust for a previous policy solution instead of rethinking their policy approach (Macnaghten & Chilvers 2014, 8).

Some steps can be taken to counter these limitations and prevent the manipulation or misuse of participants' goodwill, for example, by offering participants balanced information, expertise, and witnesses. Also, it is beneficial to entrust the management of the process to skilled outsiders and set up an advisory committee in which all stakeholders are represented. At least some of these actions are usually undertaken during participatory policymaking; however, they are not always successful. This is related to the process not being a clear-cut matter. This means a certain degree of uncertainty is unavoidable when conducting participatory policymaking (Bobbio 2019, 53).

2.4. Advocacy Organizations and Policymaking

This research also pays great attention to advocacy organizations. Advocacy attempts to influence public policy or any other decision made by the institutional elite (Casey 2014, 1). Advocacy may aim to influence matters of public interest and change power relations to improve the lives of the vulnerable (Covey & Miller 1997, 12). Advocacy activities may aim to influence both directly and indirectly. They may target decision-makers, indirectly shape public opinion, change voter intentions, or propagate different policy solutions (Casey 2014, 1).

Advocacy is most often aimed at governments or the public sector, but it may also be used to influence the private sector (Casey 2014, 1). Advocacy, in short, may be practiced by any organization that seeks to influence government policy but not to govern (Young & Everitt 2004, 5). Other terms refer to activities similar to advocacy, including activism, advising, campaigning, engagement, giving voice, providing input, lobbying, organization, educating, disseminating, and information (Casey 2014, 1). Advocacy concerns in some way changing the status quo. This may be by influencing attitudes, behaviors, laws, and policies. It may also be by changing power relations within different social groups and is generally based on the thought of pursuing social justice (Gladkikh 2010, 3).

In this sense, advocacy is rooted in social transformation because it is people-centered. It is rooted in people's survival struggles (Clark 2001, 4). In addition to this, the breadth of participation in advocacy is shaped by guiding values and politics. This is important to consider because if advocacy is people-centered, it is necessary to know who determines the values and the nature of the relationships and roles played by organizers, supporters, and people directly affected by a problem (Clark 2001, 6-7).

Young and Everitt (2004) explain that advocacy is inherently participative. Advocacy contributes to democracy based on five characteristics. First, it gives a voice to citizen interests, particularly those not represented in the mainstream institution. It provides a voice for interests or needs not adequately represented in mainstream political institutions. Second, it provides a route through which citizens can participate. Third, it supports the development and maintenance of a culture of democracy. Fourth, it facilitates the development of better public policy. Fifth, it makes a government more responsive to citizens (Young and Everitt 2004, 17).

2.4. Risks of Advocacy

One fundamental problem in conducting advocacy is representation. Advocacy activities generally concern marginalized groups, and advocates may claim to represent this particular group of people when they do not have a relationship with them (Clark 2001, 8). The distinction between representing someone else and speaking for shared values and politics is often overlooked (Clark 2001, 9). Advocates may see it as their mission to represent the political concerns of the vulnerable by inserting their voice into (international) decision-making, facilitating the two-way flow of information, and helping make the world's political and economic institutions more broadly accountable (Nyamugasira 1998, 297). However, the difficulty here lies in listening and representing marginalized groups rather than speaking for them (Nyamugasira 1998, 299). These challenges arise because marginalized individuals or groups may not access specific decision-making spaces. In these cases, advocates must remain focused on assisting excluded people in building their organizations and doing their advocacy rather than representing them (Clark 2001, 8). Advocacy can take a facilitating role that supports marginalized groups in acquiring the tools needed to speak up for themselves, so they can (better) access the decision-making process. These tools include knowledge, awareness, security, and resources (Clark 2001, 11).

Furthermore, similarly to the risk of participatory policymaking, advocacy can be risky because government institutions might allow participation to silence their critics, offering little or no opportunity for actual influence on policies and decision-making processes. This is related to the idea of the policy mirage where the opportunity for policy change attracts people to engage while continuously postponing this change. Ultimately, this might cost advocacy organizations energy, resources, and time when these are often limited. Thus, advocacy organizations must develop criteria to help them determine when a space offers real opportunities for change and when it is simply a tool for public relations (Clark 2001, 2).

Policy victories often determine the success of an advocacy campaign. Still, it does not consider whether a marginalized group now actually has the strength or capacity to sustain those such victories in the future. This is connected to their ability to hold governments (and corporations) accountable in the long run. If this is not the case, policy victories generally do not last or might even weaken the position of marginalized groups. This is because those with power might not include these groups in a meaningful way, reducing advocacy effectiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to focus not just on the success of policy victories but on how to make them durable as well (Gladkikh 2010, 16).

2.5. Public Acceptability

Public acceptability is increasingly considered to be necessary for designing effective policy. It has a vital role in political agenda-setting. Indeed, it can improve participation and compliance, reduce enforcement costs and increase the overall effectiveness of a policy (Bicket & Vanner 2016, 1). An example of this can be found by analyzing mainstream public discourses and social movements, which can steer policy debates and actions by giving politicians a democratic mandate. On the other hand, public resistance can have the opposite effect and obstruct or reverse policy decisions (Bicket & Vanner 2016, 1). The public is generally defined as all individuals or organizations who stand to be affected (directly or indirectly) by the given policy solutions and interested individuals who choose to express an opinion (Bicket & Vanner 2016, 2). Public acceptability may also be referred to with other terms, including public, social, and political acceptability or buy-in. These terms are often interchangeable (Bicket & Vanner 2016, 2).

The importance of considering the public acceptability of a policy initiative has also been recognized by the World Health Organization, which stated that effective policy, aside from being good, requires public support and the action of a broader range of stakeholders working across different levels of governance (WHO 2009, 40).

A policy initiative or solution that does not have public support is generally less likely to succeed. If the public does not accept a particular measure, this often leads to the desired change not occurring. This is not to say that public acceptability is the only relevant component that determines the effectiveness of public policy; however, it is an important one. Additionally, looking at the public acceptability of a policy initiative may be helpful because it provides insights into the likeliness that it will be successful in achieving the desired outcome.

Moreover, it can indicate the types of intervention that might be more or less appropriate to the situation. It shows resistance to changing a situation/setting/context (Branson et al. 2012, 7). It is necessary for the government to consider the public's attitude towards (proposed) policy solutions and to which extent such a solution is likely to be acceptable. The levels of acceptability may critically affect the effectiveness of the intervention. Moreover, accountable governments must be aware of public attitudes to act in the public's interest. This also maximizes their re-election chances (Diepeveen et al. 2013, 2).

2.5.1. Determining Public Acceptability

Bicket & Vanner (2016) outline trust as a vital component of public acceptability. They distinguish three dimensions. First, trust in an institution's choice of policy design and capability to implement this policy effectively. So, policies that are perceived to have an effective outcome are more likely to receive public acceptability and vice versa. The second is trust in whether an institution's motives are transparent. Policies that are perceived to have ulterior motives have lower public acceptability. The third is trust that a policy initiative put for by an institution is fair. In this case, think about perceived distributional fairness of costs and environmental burdens and procedural fairness, which is linked to higher public acceptability (Bicket & Vanner 2016, 2).

2.6. Concluding Remarks

The first section of this literature review provided an overview of the different international approaches toward sex work policy and outlined to which extent these are similar to the

Dutch context. It became clear that the current Dutch policy is most related to the legalization approach. Yet, numerous shortcomings of the policy were also identified. Namely, the government lacked insight into the size and nature of the sex work sector, which limited their ability to monitor the sector. Furthermore, it became evident that the proposed Wrs works more towards the Nordic model, based on the key factor that aims to criminalize clients of illegal/unlicensed sex workers. The second section of this literature review outlined the concepts of participatory policymaking, advocacy, and public acceptance. This section also contextualized how the Dutch sex work policy relates to these three concepts. However, the aim is to gain more in-depth insight into these phenomena throughout the research process. The outcomes of this research will be addressed in the fourth chapter.

3. Methodology

3.1. Aim of Study

For this thesis, semi-structured interviews were conducted among sex work advocacy organizations in the Netherlands to investigate their acceptability of Dutch sex work policy and understand their role in the policymaking process. It is investigated if, how, and why the themes discussed in the literature review play a role. Aside from this, attitudes of sex work advocacy organizations on potential policy solutions were examined. The research was conducted in the Netherlands.

3.2. Research Method: Qualitative Approach

Considering the exploratory focus of the research question, it is most sensible to take a qualitative research approach. Using a qualitative approach will allow me to understand better the ‘why’ behind the participants’ opinions. It will enable a more in-depth understanding of participants’ underlying reasons, attitudes, and motivations towards the research topic. This is because participants can disclose their experiences with fewer constraints than with a quantitative approach. It should also be considered that sex work is inherently a sensitive topic and a qualitative approach allows for a more careful approach when collecting primary data (Rosenthal 2016, 510).

This study aims to learn more about the attitude of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy in the Netherlands. In line with this, this thesis will conduct a thematic analysis, an independent qualitative descriptive approach. Thematic analysis helps identify, analyze, and report patterns (Vaismoradi et al. 2013, 400). A theme identifies relevant aspects of the data concerning the research question. Patterned responses or meanings corroborate this within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87). This corresponds with how the research questions are formulated, as there is room for an exploratory approach. Aside from gaining access to knowledge that sex work advocacy organizations hold, this study seeks to understand more about their experiences related to sex work policy.

The analysis of this thesis will consult primary data. The primary data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews with sex work advocacy organizations in the Netherlands.

3.3. Participants

3.3.1. Overview

For this thesis, expert interviews were conducted with sex work advocacy organizations. The choice to interview this group was based on both ethical and practical considerations. First, sex workers may be considered a vulnerable group. Therefore, interviewing them when not affiliated with an advocacy organization might require a more careful approach. Second, finding a representative number of sex workers to participate would take considerable time. Thus, this thesis relies on expert interviews instead. Nonetheless, many sex work advocacy organizations in the Netherlands are (partially) run by sex workers themselves. This resulted in three participants simultaneously being experts and sex workers. This is beneficial considering this makes up a sample more representative of sex workers.

Moreover, these organizations are informed about the Dutch sex work policy and are exposed to its effects daily. This means they understand the day-to-day implications that policies have for sex workers. It allows me to understand which outcome the policy might have in different regions and provides a diverse overview of the situation.

The final sample consisted of eight interviews. Two interviews were conducted with two participants (Interviews 4 and 6), adding up to a total of ten participants. All participants informed, advocated, or engaged with or for sex workers. The aim was to interview a diverse group of sex work advocacy organizations throughout the country to capture their perspectives on Dutch sex work policy. Difficulties were experienced regarding recruiting participants. One reason is that numerous sex work advocacy organizations could not accommodate an interview. Many organizations indicated they either did not have sufficient time or personnel. Additionally, there is quite an extensive network of sex work advocacy organizations in the Netherlands. This decreased the potential number of available participants. One reason is that one advocacy organization might govern multiple other advocacy organizations. Or, an individual might be employed/affiliated with numerous advocacy organizations. These difficulties led to the final sample of 8 interviews, even though I reached out to many organizations.

On the other hand, the study included four types of sex work advocacy organizations. These organizations were located in different regions of the country. This allowed for greater insight into differences between the organizations and regions. Furthermore, the interviews generally

lasted around 45-60 minutes, allowing the participants to provide in-depth information where they felt necessary. This relates to the concept of ‘information power’ by Malterud et al. (2015). It considers that having a rich sample size is essential to consider when conducting a study. However, it explains that this is not necessarily related to the number of participants. Rather, it is related to the sample adequacy, data quality, and variability of relevant events. This means that it is also important to consider the richness of the information provided throughout the interviews and not just the number of participants (Malterud et al. 2015, 7).

The current sample provided sufficient information to gain in-depth insight into the topic. Thus, although it would have been beneficial to have more participants, the research remains relevant. A complete list of participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviews and Participants

Interview	Organization	Participant	Method
Interview 1	Foundation	Participant 1	Online video
Interview 2	Information Center	Participant 2	Face to face
Interview 3	Civil society organization/care institution	Participant 3	Online video
Interview 4	Civil society organization	Participant 4 Participant 5	Online video
Interview 5	Civil society organization / Focus group	Participant 6	Online video
Interview 6	Civil society organization	Participant 7 Participant 8	Online video

Interview 7	Civil society organization	Participant 9	Online video
Interview 8	Civil society organization	Participant 10	Online video

3.3.2. Sampling Strategy

The respondents for this interview were selected through a non-probability sampling method. This meant that individuals were selected based on non-random criteria. This sampling method is specifically beneficial when the aim is to understand the (opinions) of a small or under-researched research population (Vehovar et al. 2016, 329). The specific type of sampling that was used is purposive sampling. This means that the researcher selected a sample that is most useful to the purpose of the research. This way, the researcher gained detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than statistical inferences about a relatively small population. An effective purposive sample must have clear criteria and rationale for inclusion (Vehovar et al. 2016, 329-330).

For this thesis, the following criteria were used to select a sample that is most useful for the purpose of the research. Firstly, the participant must be part of an advocacy organization that adheres to the previously stated definition. Secondly, this advocacy organization must have sufficient knowledge of the Dutch sex work policy. This means the organization should understand most aspects of the current policy and the proposed Wrs. Thirdly, the advocacy organization must be knowledgeable about the position of sex workers in Dutch society. Lastly, the advocacy organization must be based in the Netherlands.

Considering that most advocacy organizations provide online information about their purpose and actions, it can determine whether or not a participant adheres to the criteria mentioned above through preliminary desktop research. Participants were recruited by contacting them via email or private contact information forms. Furthermore, the interviews may take place in person or online and may be conducted in Dutch or English – depending on the participant's preference.

3.3.3. Setting & Interview Procedure

Seven interviews took place online via MS Teams video call. One additional interview took place face-to-face in an organization's office. All interviews were conducted in Dutch. At the start of each interview, participants were informed about several factors. First, who the researcher was and which university they attended. The second is the purpose of the interview. Third, they would remain anonymous. Fourth that they could decide to withdraw from the study at any moment. This information was also provided to the participant before the interview with an information pamphlet (see Appendix 1). Participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 2 for translated version). All interviews were recorded and transcribed, except for one interview. Participant 3 did not give consent to record the interview.

3.4. Data Collection Tools & Analysis

3.4.1. Data Collection Tools

This thesis collected data through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are advantageous as they allow more flexibility to digress based on interactions during the interview (Blee & Taylor 2002, 92). Semi-structured interviews provide a greater breadth and depth of information. This means there is a greater opportunity to discover the respondent's interpretation of reality and access their ideas. Moreover, semi-structured interviews help explore, discover, and interpret complex social events or processes (Blee & Taylor 2002, 93). To help structure the interview, an interview guide was created based on the four sub-questions of this research. This means that the interview guide broadly outlined the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations on the current policy, the Wrs, their perception of effective policy measures, and their role in the policymaking process. However, space was also left open for participants to add information they felt was connected to the topic.

3.4.2. Data Analysis

The interviews were all transcribed in Dutch. Although, a small part of one interview took place in English due to outside factors. After this, the data was coded based on a strategy by Braun and Clarke (2006). This strategy entails generating an initial list of ideas about what information is provided in the data and highlighting what is relevant about this data. These highlights then form the initial codes from the data. The codes indicate aspects of the data

that are interesting to the researcher. From this process, themes are identified (Braun and Clarke 2006, 95). The coding process was conducted using ATLAS.ti, which is a software program. The data was eventually coded based on relevant key factors and separated into themes. Furthermore, additional topics that came up during the interview were also included.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

I reached out to participants to request an interview either by email or by contacting them through a contact form on their websites. All participants contacted by email received an information leaflet that entailed the purpose of my study. It was impossible to provide participants who were contacted through private contact forms with the same information leaflet copy. However, the information on the leaflet was added directly to the private contact form. All participants signed a consent form stating their right to withdraw their consent, and no recordings were made without consent. After all the interviews were transcribed, the data was anonymized.

3.6. Limitations

Several limitations were identified in this research. First is the limited sample size of 8 interviews. Several sex work advocacy organizations did not have sufficient capacity to accommodate an interview. Additionally, the number of potential respondents is limited. This is due to many sex work advocacy organizations being affiliated with each other and potential respondents being employed by more than one organization. Nonetheless, the study included a diverse range of sex work advocacy organizations located throughout the country. This allowed for greater insight into differences between different organizations or regions.

Second, this research did not include all stakeholders concerning sex work policy in the Netherlands. Instead, it focused specifically on sex work advocacy organizations. This means that not all possible perspectives on the topic were considered throughout the analysis. However, this thesis aimed to include sex work advocacy organizations in the research, considering this group is often left out of academic research concerning this topic.

Third, all participants were categorized under the term ‘sex work advocacy organization.’ It is true that all participating organizations indeed, in some manner, informed, advocated, or engaged with or for sex workers. However, the organizations did have different purposes and diverging manners in which they engaged with (other) sex workers. Whereas some were engaged in providing support to sex workers solely from a civil society perspective, others were also actively lobbying for changes in sex work policy. This means

there was no complete uniformity in terms of the participants. On the other hand, this also allowed for the inclusion of different perspectives on sex work policy based on different interactions with sex workers.

Fourth, all interviews were conducted in Dutch and later translated into English. It should be noted that certain meanings might be construed differently due to this translation process. This is especially true in terms of government documents and policies.

4. Findings & Analysis

The following chapter contains the analysis of the collected data. As a result, the analysis has four main themes. First is the acceptability of participants towards the current sex work policy. Second is the acceptability of participants towards the Wrs. The third is the participant's role in the policymaking process. Lastly, are the potential policy approaches that participants found beneficial.

4.1. Acceptability of the Current Policy

This section of the analysis will provide insight into the acceptability of sex work organizations towards the current Dutch policy on sex work. All participants brought up four general themes. First was the complexity of the current policy based on a municipalities ability to form its policy within the national guidelines. The second was the lack of available safe workplaces for sex workers. The third was the increasing number of instances in which municipalities work towards the so-called 'extinction policy'. Lastly, there was stigmatization within organizations that are considered stakeholders. These themes will be discussed in-depth throughout the section.

4.1.1. The Complexity of the Current Policy

The first recurring theme was the complex nature of the current Dutch sex work policy. Sex work policy is arranged differently in each municipality (Participants 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10). Understandably slight differences may be necessary because certain municipalities may not be able to facilitate a sex work sector to the same degree as others (Participant 1). The lack of uniformity is considered an issue by all participants. Participants 1 & 9 consider the policy complex firstly because there are so many different rules that can apply to practicing sex work; it is difficult for sex workers to understand which rules apply to them and which do not, especially if they, for example, work in a different municipality than the one they live in. Moreover, participant 9 explained that municipalities generally do not offer clear guidelines about their sex work policy. It is often not stated on their website or otherwise easily accessible. This makes gaining insights into the regulations that apply in a municipality even more difficult.

Participants 3 and 10 also mentioned that the sex work policy is too complicated, considering it is a legal profession. They state that if it is truly a legal profession, its policy should not be so different from other professions. Participant 3 mentions explicitly that everything surrounding sex work policy is made specific. For example, generally, in other sectors, someone who owns a business is self-employed and more or less operates similarly. However, for sex workers, there is a special regulation; Opting-in. Participants 1 & 3 state that though the Opting-in approach works well for some sex workers, it still does not consider necessary measures such as pensions, insurance, or other types of collective agreements that other legal professions have. So, the policy is more complex but lacks any type of social benefit protection.

Participants 7 & 8 also consider sex work a legal profession. However, they do emphasize that the government regards it as a 'special profession' due to the many abuses in the sector. Participants 7 & 8 also state that though the new policy is being developed at the national level, this has been the case since 2008, and no significant changes have occurred yet. For this reason, they find well-functioning local policy vital as it currently affects sex workers more directly. Participant 2 states that finalizing an effective and acceptable national policy is necessary, considering the world has changed since the lift of the brothel ban in 2000.

4.1.2. Safe Workplaces

One main issue that continuously resurfaced throughout the interviews is that sex workers want to be able to practice their work safely. Yet, municipalities do not offer safe and legal workplaces. Participants 1 & 2 explain that sex workers need safe workplaces for several reasons. First, so that they can ring the alarm if something wrong does occur, legal workplaces more often have these types of alarm systems or managers keeping surveillance. This gives a greater sense of security. Also, if clients are aware that safety measures are in place they are less likely to perpetrate crimes or be violent.

In most municipalities, work from home is not permitted. And even if it is permitted, the regional housing associations might not permit it (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5). Most participants stated it would be beneficial if sex work from home were permitted. Participant 3 also emphasized that housing associations generally consider illegally conducting sex work in one's home the same type of law violation as growing cannabis. She states that this is strange considering sex work, according to national law, is legal, whereas growing cannabis is not. Additionally, she acknowledges that housing associations may consider sex work from home

as an issue if there is proof that it causing nuisance. However, in her experience, sex work from home usually does not cause a nuisance. And in the cases that nuisance is experienced, this is often related to different struggles a person might have, such as addiction, rather than the sex work itself.

When discussing sex work from home, certain factors should be considered. Working from home does not, per definition, ensure a safe workplace – abuses can occur in such places too. Similarly, to working in a different sex work establishment, it would be advisable that sex workers take security measures that they deem appropriate to ensure their safety (Participants 1 & 10). However, allowing sex workers to work from home legally is beneficial because it lowers the barrier this group might experience in contacting law enforcement. This is because they would not need to fear going to the police as illegal workers. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that sex workers' hesitation in contacting the police is related to more than just this issue of working illegally. It also concerns their experiences of stigmatization.

4.1.3. Extinction Policy (*uitsterfbeeld*)

In addition to municipalities generally not allowing sex work to occur from home, participants also saw a trend in fewer licenses being granted to sex work business operators. This results in numerous sex work business establishments being shut down (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10). There are numerous issues associated with these establishments shutting down.

Participant 10 explains that it might be challenging for sex work business operators to continue managing a viable business when new policy initiatives are continuously proposed without being implemented. Additionally, municipalities might decide not to grant sex work businesses new permits, thereby gradually decreasing the number of places where sex work can take place legally (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10). This is also referred to as extinction policy (*uitsterfbeeld*). Participant 2 also points out that although policy plays a role, she also experienced a general lack of willingness to innovate by many sex work businesses that have been established for a long time.

Furthermore, Participant 1 emphasized that the lack of safe, legal workplaces offered by municipalities more or less forces sex workers to work illegally, often in a less safe workplace. This is concerning considering clients with wrong intentions usually know whether or not a sex worker is practicing their work legally or illegally. If they want to act on these wrong intentions, they will likely go to a sex worker working illegally as it is less likely they will report the crimes to law enforcement. This ultimately creates unsafe work conditions

for sex workers and does not contribute to combatting violence, abuses, and malpractices in the sector (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

4.1.4. Stigma Concerning Sex Work

The stigma that surrounds sex work is prevalent in many aspects. Participant 1 explains that this is partially related to the mainstream vision that only women are sex workers and are forced to conduct sex work against their will. If not, they cannot possibly enjoy their profession. On the other hand, men are generally seen as the only potential clients and are considered “pigs who only want sex.” This leads to the view that “society needs to protect these women.” She states that sex workers are rarely regarded as capable people that can make informed and healthy decisions (Participant 1). All participants considered the stigmatization of the sex work sector as an important barrier to improving the position of sex workers. All Participants stated that there is generally a lack of nuance in how sex work and human trafficking or extortion differ. This results in a lack of differentiation in the framing, policy formulation, and general understanding of the actual nature of the sex work sector and the malpractices occurring in it.

Stigmatization and municipal agencies

Numerous participants also experienced this lack of nuance in the policy concerning the exit programs (*uitstapprogrammas*) for sex workers. The policy is created based on the idea that most sex workers want to exit the sector. As a result, civil society organizations offering (long-term) support to sex workers generally receive a majority of their funding specifically to offer exit programs. In reality, many sex workers do not want to exit the sector. Instead, they might require support with personal or business matters. This concerns a diverse set of matters such as applying for social benefits, gaining access to an accountant, and asking questions about municipal policy on sex work. Moreover, a sex worker might just want to talk to a non-judgmental person about their experiences without necessarily wanting to exit the sector. These types of support are generally still provided by most organizations (Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10).

Participants stated that (being encouraged) to portray themselves as only offering exit programs creates a barrier between themselves and sex workers seeking a different type of support. This results in sex workers sometimes not feeling comfortable requesting support

from such an organization (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6).

Participant 9 said the following:

“We really needed to adjust our texts more to show that we were not just offering exit programs because we were not even reaching the people who might want to exit the sex work sector. It just doesn’t work like that. If a person is unsure about whether or not they want to exit the sector they will be too hesitant to contact us because they felt like they would need to make the decision to exit right away. Also, we never have a sex worker who wants to exit the sex work sector overnight. The important thing is that we can be in touch with them, that we can be supportive, and provide the right information. And then, yes, if they ever want to exit the sex work sector the seed will be planted, and they will know who they can ask for support.”

Participants 4, 5 & 9 stated that the municipalities they were working with initially were not keen on *publicly* stating that these organizations also offered other types of support to sex workers. In their opinion, this was related to numerous challenges. First is a general lack of knowledge about the sector: they stated that municipal officers often simply did not know what was happening in the sex work sector. Second is the occurrence of stigma. They experienced that talking about sex work or exploitation sometimes caused a general discomfort with their counterparts. This made communicating the necessary steps more difficult. The third is the lack of normalization around sex work. This is related to the stigmatization aspect. Because of the stigma, sex work is not considered a normal profession even though it is legal. This translates into the way policymakers make (restrictive) sex work policies. Participants 4, 5 & 10 also emphasized that these issues contribute to the lack of visibility of sex workers. Participant 5 explained that sometimes it feels like (municipal) policymakers feel that if they do not talk about the topic out loud, people consider it not to be there, meaning no action is necessary.

It should be noted that no participants stated they wanted the exit programs to shut down. All participants agreed exit programs should be accessible to any sex worker who wants to use one. Nor do any of the participants deny that malpractices and abuses, including extortion and human trafficking, occur in the sex work sector. However, they do not believe the current policy sufficiently addresses these issues. Moreover, most participants consider it an issue that stigmas emphasize the sector's ‘bad, immoral, and damaging’ side. When in fact, many people

willingly conduct sex work, are proud of their profession, and enjoy doing it (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

Participant 1 stated that stigmatization is also present in other settings, such as when interacting with banks or insurance companies. The participant provided an anecdote about her experience requesting a loan and insurance for her sex work business plan. The bank continuously denied her request for a loan, even though her business plan was viable and legal. It was denied on the precipice of the participant being a sex worker (Participant 1).

Stigmatization and law enforcement agencies

Participants also provided accounts of stigmatization relating to law enforcement agencies. Participant 1 states that there are instances in which sex workers do involve the police and report abuses, but these reports might not be taken seriously. For example, there have been instances during which sex workers reported being raped while conducting their work to law enforcement. Law enforcement authorities continued not to take this accusation seriously as they did not understand how sex workers could be raped during work. Additionally, participant 4 gave the following anecdote:

“Recently I got a call (.....), and I picked up, and the person said, “yes, we have one, we have one!”. And I thought, “Huh, a. who are you? and b. what do you have?”. So, I say, “sorry, but I can’t respond anything to this right now, and who are you?”. The person responds, “Yes, I am a special investigating officer from the municipality.” So, I say, “what have you got?” and the person says “Yes, an unlicensed sex worker!”, as if it were a trophy.”

Instances like these display that the lack of general knowledge about the sector, the existing stigmatization, and the lack of normalization are also apparent in law enforcement agencies. This is usually not related to law enforcement agencies not wanting to address malpractices and abuses in the sector but rather a general lack of knowledge on how to interact with sex workers.

Yet, a different perspective should also be highlighted. Many law enforcement agencies do take sex workers seriously. Participants 7 and 8 state that within their regional area, law officers (both human trafficking detectives, the special investigating officer, and community officers) have a satisfactory affinity with the target group. They did not receive complaints about any negative types of law enforcement behaviors from sex workers. They also state that, at times, there are instances in which they view reversed stigma. For example,

sex workers from abroad might be more skeptical about law enforcement in the Netherlands based on their experiences in their home countries. Participant 1 adds that there are indeed law enforcement officers who are open-minded and correctly conduct themselves when interacting with sex workers. Yet, the lack of trust that sex workers have in them remains understandably low, which enforces the high barrier between law enforcement and sex workers (Participants 1, 6, 7, 8, 10).

Based on the challenges described above, all participants stated they were not fully satisfied with the current policy. It could be argued that when the current policy was implemented in 2000 (lift of the brothel ban), the policy was not meant with bad intentions toward sex workers or their clients. Instead, it was a pragmatic answer to the failure of the brothel ban before 2000 and a way of gaining more insight into the sector (Participant 2). Participant 2 provided the following anecdote about the current policy:

“Yes, at the time they realized the brothel ban was a totally empty law, so they decided to lift it. It was a very pragmatic decision. But it wasn’t to hurt the customers or the sex workers, but to improve things. So they gave the municipality a lot of say in that and well, that was probably a good idea at the time. (.....) But it back-fired because the municipality took a much more rigorous approach than we ever imagined. And a zero option was not actually allowed, but de facto, it does happen of course.”

Participants 1, 2, 9 & 10 stated that sex work policy is often enforced more strictly on a municipal level than the national law requires. Indeed, fewer or no licenses are being granted, less workplaces are available, stigmatization remains, and the government is not closer to having sufficient insight into the sex work sector. In light of this, several participants find it necessary for the government to *amend* the current policy so that these failings are addressed. For example, by legalizing more aspects of sex, encouraging municipalities to take a more facilitating role, and ensuring the provision of more safe workplaces. Moreover, these regulations would need to be nationwide.

4.2. Acceptability of the Wrs

This section of the analysis will provide insight into the acceptability of sex work organizations towards the proposed Wrs. Participants brought up four general themes. First was the expected effect of the Wrs on the visibility of sex workers. The second was participants' dissatisfaction with the mandatory registration with a sex worker's social security

number. The third is the participants' dissatisfaction with the proposed 'self-reliance' meetings. The fourth was difficulty accepting that the Wrs is heavily based on morals and used as a negotiation deal.

4.2.1. The Wrs and the Visibility of Sex Workers

All participants expressed concern that they believe the Wrs will result in the sex work sector going more under the radar, thereby further decreasing the visibility on sex workers. They fear that this lack of visibility in the sector will result in sex workers being put at more risk. Certain participants also believe that the Wrs, being a more restrictive policy approach, will further weaken the position of sex workers in Dutch society.

Participants 4 & 5 also stated that the Wrs is paradoxical. On one hand, the sex work sector and sex workers are likely to become less visible, thereby decreasing their safety. Yet, one of the reasons for this is that the Wrs shines a spotlight so heavily on sex workers, without providing a nuanced picture of the situation. Participant 6 adds to this by saying that the Wrs will only increase abuses in the sex work sector because many sex workers will not be able to register, thereby driving the sector more into the underground and making them more vulnerable. Additionally, most participants do not see any value in potentially criminalizing clients or facilitators of *illegal* sex work based on the condition that they are not actually causing abuses or malpractices.

4.2.2. Mandatory Registration

Participants 1 & 10 state that registration with someone's social security number does occur in the Netherlands, for example, if you are a nurse who registers for exams to keep up-to-date with recent medical expertise. This registration is done to protect those the nurse treats and ensure they are in safe hands. So, several participants question who the Wrs is supposed to help. The policy is supposed to counter abuses and malpractices (especially human trafficking), increase transparency and help the sex workers. It is supposed to protect the person registering, which is the sex worker, not the client (Participant 1). Participant 3 also states that the government again allows for discrepancies between professions in this case. She states there is no good reason that specifically sex workers need to be entered into a national register with their social security number.

Participant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6 also questions what the government would want to do with such a list and do not trust the government to keep this personal data safe, nor do they believe that

the government is being transparent about what will happen with the data. Participants 1, 2 & 5 add that with the stigmatization still existing around sex work, disclosing such personal information about sex workers in a national register could be very dangerous. If such information were to leak, many sex workers would be put at risk and could face dangerous situations.

4.2.3. Licensing Meetings and Sufficient Self-Reliance

The Wrs would also require sex workers to conduct one or two meetings (depending on amendments to the policy) with a municipal officer to determine whether or not the person is sufficiently self-reliant to (continue) conduct sex work. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10 stated they consider the term ‘self-reliant to be broad and vague. Participants 1 and 10 stated that whether a person is regarded as self-reliant is very much based on the interpretation of the person conducting the meeting. Moreover, the Wrs does not provide a detailed justification of when a person is or is not deemed sufficiently self-reliant (Participants 1, 5 & 10).

Furthermore, all participants agreed that one or two meetings solely with municipal officers would not effectively determine whether a person applying for a license is a victim of extortion or human trafficking. This is related to numerous reasons. First, participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 consider that a sex worker who willingly conducts their profession but cannot do so legally (by being granted a permit) is unlikely to adhere to the Wrs. Instead, sex workers will likely continue to conduct their work illegally. Thereby weakening the safety, visibility, and ensuing position of sex workers. This is contrary to the Wrs.

Secondly, all participants consider it highly unlikely that an untrained municipal officer alone can determine if a person is self-reliant. First, it is not the job of a municipal officer. Second, all participants emphasized that it is very difficult for even a trained professional) to understand if a person is a victim of extortion or human trafficking. Moreover, there are cases in which a person might not even realize they are victims. The participants state that it sometimes takes them up to a year to understand the actual situation a (forced) sex worker is in. It would be almost impossible for a municipal officer to determine this within one or two meetings. Participants 4, 5 & 6 also state that conducting a second meeting with a municipal officer after a year will be ineffective. Participant 4 said the following:

“A lot can happen in a year. Someone might willingly start sex work, but this can change anytime. Having a meeting with a municipal officer will not help this.”

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, & 9 also emphasize that conducting a meeting to assess if a person is self-reliant further increases stigmatization because it reinforces the image that sex workers are ‘not capable’ or not ‘self-reliant.’

Nonetheless, not all participants are entirely against sex workers meeting with municipal officers. Participants 7 & 8 do see value in such meetings based on several conditions. First is that a professionally trained caregiver or social worker who is there long-term and is easily accessible to the sex worker is present at the meetings. Secondly, they do not consider one or two meetings to be enough. They explain that it is essential that the contact between this trained professional and the sex worker is durable so that a sex worker can build up trust toward the social worker/caregiver. Participant 3 also emphasizes that this trust can only be built through a long-lasting relationship with a trained professional. However, she does foresee issues with having such a trained professional assess whether a person is self-reliant, considering this will infringe on the neutral position that such a professional is meant to have. Participant 9 also does not see any value in the mandatory face-to-face meetings. Instead, she would consider it beneficial if sex workers had the option to meet with a municipal officer to ask questions related to the municipalities’ policy to make support more accessible.

4.2.4. Policy Based on Morals

Numerous participants stated that the government was transparent about the Wrs being used as a negotiation deal between the ChristenUnie and the D66 (another coalition party) during the creation of the current coalition government. This was communicated to sex work advocacy organizations during a meeting about the Wrs that took place with the State Secretary of Justice and Safety in the first half of 2022 (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10). Participants 1, 2 & 6 emphasize that this makes it clear that the Wrs is being used to negotiate a political deal at the expense of sex workers.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6 emphasized that they found it very difficult to accept that the Dutch policy on sex work is so dependent on the morals of conservative political parties. They state that the government continues to move forward with the Wrs despite their pleas and evidence that it is very unlikely that the Wrs will be effective. Participant 2 emphasizes that sex work policy should be based on a more logical and pragmatic approach to what is occurring in the sector rather than if a person deems it immoral. Instead, morals are considered a more substantial basis for creating policy. The participant stated that this does

not mean she does not respect these morals, merely that they should not be able to have such a heavy influence on sex work policy. Participant 2 states:

“Yes, there are real problems in the sex work sector, that’s absolutely true (.....), but since then, human trafficking has simply been the theme, and that has been put on the agenda very conveniently. It has been framed by, yes, anti-prostitution people. And they have done it very nicely. I did not see that coming. It came partially from the Christian corner, the neoconservative corner, and of course also non-Christian people who also want to maintain the cornerstone of society, the patriarchy. But also, the feminist women in Sweden who had the idea that sex work is by definition oppression even if you say that you want it yourself.”

Based on the perceptions of sex work advocacy organizations discussed above, it is clear that the participants are not supportive of the Wrs. The reasons for this are mainly related to the fact that they believe it will be ineffective. This perspective is based on their interactions with sex workers and existing studies considering the effects of a similar policy approach.

Participants 7 & 8 state they find it a naïve thought that the Wrs will contribute to addressing malpractices and abuses in the sex work sector in the short term. Moreover, participants 4 & 5 state that though the government views the Wrs as a positive contribution, this is not the case for those directly affected by the policy. Participants also emphasized that the Wrs is likely to contribute to stigmatization rather than combat it.

4.3.Participant’s Role in the Policymaking Process

This section focuses on sex work advocacy organizations' role in the policymaking process. Several themes were discussed. First is participants' perceived satisfaction level when interacting with other sex work advocacy organizations. The second is participants' perceived satisfaction level when interacting with government agencies. Lastly, this section will discuss to which extent the participants trust these government agencies and find them transparent.

4.3.1. Interactions with Other Sex Work Advocacy Organizations

All participants stated they worked together or interacted with other sex work advocacy organizations. However, the extent to which this occurred differed per participant.

Participants 1, 2, 4, 5 & 10 indicated they worked together with the S.W.A.D. These participants were very satisfied with the existence of this particular organization considering it facilitated the development of an organization that represents many smaller organizations.

The participants considered it essential to work with other organizations for numerous

reasons. First, to use and share each other's knowledge. For example, they may support each other with insights on gaining better access to financial facilities such as loans or insurance.

Additionally, the collaboration between sex work advocacy organizations is vital because it allows them to coordinate with each other. For example, suppose a sex worker receives support from an organization within their region but decides to move. In that case, it is easy for participants to refer them to an organization closer to them. Participant 10 also emphasized the importance of having a well-functioning and connected sex work advocacy setting to achieve effective policy. She states that, for example, this was an important condition for achieving a more progressive sex work policy in New Zealand.

Participants who were part of an organization that did not employ sex workers themselves also emphasized the importance of including sex workers themselves more in the policymaking process. However, participants 3, 9 & 10 would like to see more inclusion of sex work advocacy organizations that pay extra attention to activism in, for example, a municipal setting. This is important to consider because these types of sex work advocacy organizations are indeed more often occupied by sex workers themselves. This would increase the representation of sex workers in the policymaking process. Participants 4 and 5 agree that they would like more interaction with other sex work advocacy organizations so that the provision of support can be increasingly carried together.

4.3.2. Interactions with Government Agencies

Interactions with municipalities

Participants' overall satisfaction levels with their interactions with government agencies diverged significantly. Both between one another but also over time. All participants reiterated that whether or not they were satisfied with these interactions and could influence the municipal sex work policy was very dependent on three matters. First was the presence of the right person, at the right place, at the right time. With this, participants meant that whether or not government agencies heard them, in this case mainly municipalities, was very dependent on if a certain municipal officer was willing to listen to them and publicly advocate for change within their municipality. The second was the political layout of a municipal council. This means that if a municipal council moved more towards the conservative end, it was generally more difficult for them to influence the policy of that region. In contrast, a more progressive municipal council was likelier to listen to their ideas. The third was the

chances of either this 'right' person or the 'right' political layout staying in office long enough for policy change to occur and become long-lasting.

Participant 1 states that bureaucracy is another difficulty in approving policy/business ideas in municipalities. She states there are so many functions within a municipality and municipal officers often send the organization from one person to the next. In the end, you need to start with your ideas all over again. Participant 1 & 6 also reiterate the benefits of having interactions with municipalities that is accessible and respectful. Participant 1 had an encounter in which she was going to discuss her policy proposals with a municipality. The encounter included about 20 project leaders at one end of the table and her organization at the other end. This type of setting made the distance between them and the others too large and created this feeling of there being two opposing parties rather than two parties trying to work towards a goal together. Participants 1 & 6 also spoke to different policymakers in the municipality of Tilburg and were very satisfied with these interactions.

Participant 1 stated that she was quite satisfied with these interactions as they were very open-minded, respectful, and had an affinity with the sex work sector and sex work policy. She states that it was evident that the municipality had spoken to other sex work advocacy organizations and knew more about the topic. Participant 3 also interacted with the municipality of Tilburg and was satisfied with the interactions. The contact between her organization, the municipality, and law enforcement was more accessible, and barriers between them were decreased due to the setting being more open and intimate. However, she also indicates that this is not always the case with other municipalities. Participant 6 also reiterated that it was important that the municipal officers treated her with respect throughout these interactions. This is to say that they listened to her ideas and did not consider her as 'just a sex worker who is incapable.' Moreover, they emphasized that it is beneficial when contact between sex work advocacy organizations and municipalities is easily accessible.

This was also the case for Participants 4 and 5. Within their region, a person in the municipality was open to hearing their side of the story. This resulted in them conducting a needs assessment research of sex workers within their region. This needs assessment research became a base for the policy direction in the municipalities within their regions. Participant 2 also had differing experiences in her interactions with government agencies. In cooperation with other advocacy organizations, the participant hosted the Swally awards. This award is intended for local representatives who have made a positive effort in recent years for the rights of sex workers in their municipality. Earlier this year, they awarded certain

representatives of the people with Swally awards. This was to thank these representatives for their efforts. However, it is also important because it provides a space where local politicians can create networks. This enables a situation in which sex work is more discussed from the perspective of those who know what sex workers want. She considers this a hopeful change.

Participants 7 & 8 also state that they are satisfied with their current interactions with municipalities. However, they also highlight that getting to this point took time. Participant 7 stated that:

“Yes, because at the municipality, sometimes there are changes of officials and sometimes it takes a while to find a good discussion partner, a good point of contact. (...) it really is a point of perseverance. But eventually, we really grew closer. Now we can really make contact and say, ‘Gosh, we want to talk to you, about policy, about a difficult case, about cooperation’”

These participants were also able to create a new policy plan in collaboration with law enforcement agencies within their region.

On the other hand, participants 1, 2, 6 & 10 highlight the importance of not just listening to sex workers and sex work advocacy organizations. But also translating what is said into policy. Participants 1, 2, 6 & 10 especially felt that there were times when policymakers, both on a municipal and national level, listened to them mainly to be able to ‘check them off the list.’ Participant 2 mentioned the following:

“Yeah, but actually, what I’ve noticed a lot is that policymakers will say, “yes, we’ve talked to them,” but that’s not to say they’ve listened and actually taken what we said to heart. (...) well, I also experienced that at the municipal and provincial levels. Things are pre-cooked, and then the democratic process starts. But in reality, they are just going check, check, check, check, check, check, and state that they have spoken to the residents and the locals. But in the end, they still go their own way.”

Interactions with other government agencies

Participant 3 states that overall, she was satisfied with her interactions with law enforcement agencies, especially the AVIM, which investigates foreigners' identity and residence status, and larger-scale crimes such as human trafficking, smuggling, and identity fraud. She states that she was satisfied with these interactions because the AVIM in her region focused more on ensuring that victims had access to care and support rather than solely investigating and

monitoring human trafficking. Additionally, there was a low threshold between the participant and the AVIM, allowing easy contact.

Participants 7 & 8 also stated that they are very involved with the law enforcement agencies in their region. They state this is possible due to short lines between them and the agencies. Participants 4 & 5 also talked about their interactions with law enforcement agencies and stated that they were quite satisfied with these interactions recently. They experienced the incidence that was explained in an earlier section. Based on this confrontation, they planned a discussion with the municipality and different law enforcement agencies in which they provided a workshop on how to better interact with (illegal) sex workers. Although they were displeased with how the agencies had acted before, they were satisfied with how open they were to receiving the workshop and discussing a better way forward. They state that part of this is about ensuring that all stakeholders know that sex work and human trafficking are not the same things and that they should not be treated the same.

Participants 4 & 5 also had instances where they experienced prejudices and stigmatization with the GGD, which is the government aid agency. In light of this, they are trying to create awareness in their actions with these organizations to influence their behavior towards sex workers and their attitude towards sex work policy. They state that though they are quite satisfied with how these interactions are going, it remains something they need to work towards constantly. They said they are happy that certain government agencies are reaching out to them more and asking them to give their opinion on certain cases or local policy initiatives. The same goes for participant 6.

However, these participants are not satisfied that the sex work policy depends on which political parties are in the municipal council. If acceptable policy measures are implemented, this does not mean they will continue to be enforced. This is also related to the fact that many outside factors influence sex work policy. For example, the agenda of certain political parties. This can make the process of creating durable change difficult. Participant 2 states the following:

“ I always thought that going forward is a straight way ahead, but I didn't know that that could also take a U-turn. ”

This section focusing on the interactions between participants and governmental agencies provides meaningful new insights into the policymaking process. Although participants might not yet have a significant influence on national policy measures, such as the Wrs, it is clear

that they have a vital role to fulfill in the local policymaking processes. The reason for this is that they are often the (only) organizations that connect with sex workers *and* other stakeholders. This does not mean that their suggestions are always integrated into new policies. As numerous participants already stated, they are sometimes asked to participate, yet their policy ideas are not adopted. Or sometimes their ideas might be integrated, but just minimally. However, it is likely that they are the ones who will be consulted if policymakers or government officials do decide to create or change sex work policy within their region.

Overall, most participants did influence the sex work policy in their region. For example:

1. The creation of a new policy approach in collaboration with sex workers (Participant 6);
2. The opportunity to conduct a needs assessment research among sex workers which informed new policy (Participants 4 & 5);
3. The creation of a new sex work policy in collaboration with law enforcement agencies (Participants 7 & 8); and
4. The creation of separate policy approaches to sex work and human trafficking within a municipality (Participant 10).

4.3.3. Trust and Transparency Toward the Government

Participant 1 emphasized that openness and transparency from other parties are essential to be included in the policymaking process. Openness to listen to them and openness that allows for more transparency and normalization of sex work. Sex in general and sex work should not be matters that are never discussed openly because this ensures that they remain stigmatized. The participant reiterates that her intention is not necessarily to change anyone's mind or convince them of her opinions but to ensure that, at the very least, it is possible to talk about such matters openly. In line with this, the participant also considers it essential that sex work policy is transparent, not just to sex workers but also to the general public. However, such transparency needs to go hand in hand with addressing stigmatization.

Participant 3 states that overall, she is satisfied with her interactions with government agencies and feels like, over time, they have become more open and willing to listen. However, she does not always find the government agencies transparent. She did find the State Secretary of Justice and Safety transparent in his motives and capabilities relating to the meeting mentioned earlier. However, she is hesitant to trust that local government agencies

are always transparent about their motives and what they aim to do with information that advocacy organizations provide them with about sex workers in the region. This lack of trust is also related to her experience of feeling that stigmatization still exists within municipalities and when talking to municipal officers. The participant has similar feelings towards housing associations. She does not trust them with private information about specific sex workers, regardless of their portrayed intention of needing such information to provide support or interest in sex workers.

Participants 4 & 5 indicated that their trust in the local government agencies being transparent was conditional on whom they were speaking to. Participant 6 states that she considers the local government agencies she interacts with transparent. However, she also perceives challenges with new personnel. She trusts that those with whom she has been in contact for longer are transparent. However, she also perceives that new personnel, especially those who have not worked with sex workers before, can initially be prejudiced toward listening to sex workers. Participant 6 explains a similar experience:

“ It still is tough. There is transparency let's put that upfront. But sometimes, I do still see issues. Some people that I interact with frequently will just tell me what the situation is. But sometimes, with new people, there will be some prejudice. When you interact with them, you feel that their first thought is ‘oh hey, she is a sex worker, she does that profession’, you know? And meanwhile, when we are chatting to each other, and they realize I am also a grandmother, that I also do my laundry, that I am also just a warm person who can show interest in how you are doing, they think ‘wow’.

Several participants emphasized that these types of interactions occur frequently. Sex workers initially might not be viewed as people who are capable. Sex workers also experience this when talking to policymakers. For these reasons, it is so important to normalize sex work, create awareness, and address stigmas.

Furthermore, participants also indicated that they often did not see the policy initiatives that are being taken or proposed as fair towards sex workers. This also decreased their level of trust in the government.

Participant 6 also felt a lack of transparency regarding the national government. For example, a letter from the State Secretary to the parliament claimed that the S.W.A.D. was willing to participate in the Wrs when this was not the case. The participant also stated that she was not entirely trustful of the talk with the State Secretary. After the meeting, he proposed several

amendments to the Wrs to parliament. These amendments included not criminalizing all parties that facilitate illegal sex work and proposed two face-to-face meetings rather than one. However, participant 6 explained sex work advocacy organizations who were present at the meeting expressed their concern about face-to-face meetings. In this case, she also felt that sex workers and sex work advocacy organizations were invited to participate in the policymaking process. Yet, their input was not fully integrated into policy terms they deemed acceptable. The participant said it seemed like they were willing to change small parts of the Wrs but continue to push the entire Wrs forward when no one of the target group wanted this policy to be implemented.

Participant 10 stated that her trust in local government agencies has increased over time as her organization has interacted with them. One of the reasons for this is that she felt they implemented certain policy ideas from this organization within their region. For example, the municipality enforced separate policy approaches to sex work and human trafficking in their region. However, there was still a satisfactory degree of cohesion between the approaches.

Overall, whether the participants trusted the government agencies and found them transparent was very dependent on which specific person they were interacting with and whether or not this person was open to listening to their (policy) ideas and willing to publicly state their support for them (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, & 10). For example, participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6 trusted that the State Secretary was transparent about his willingness to support sex workers in their quest for more effective policy. However, they were not necessarily trustful that he would be able to bring about significant changes to the Wrs or the current policy. This was related to the participant's lack of trust in the government. It seems that most participants are more trustful about being able to bring about change on the municipal level rather than the national level. This is partially because they are constantly in dialogue with the stakeholders within their regions, and with time they have seen changes occur in these regions. However, this type of progress is difficult to achieve if municipalities are not open to listening. This makes government agencies' willingness to be open an essential condition for trust (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10). Moreover, this trust in the transparency and ability of municipalities to achieve change depends on certain government officials' presence. This trust is not transferred to the coalition that currently makes up the national government (Participants 2 & 10).

4.4. Acceptable Policy Approaches, Smaller Scale Policy Initiatives, and Stakeholder Inclusion

This section focuses on the policy approaches participants deemed acceptable, smaller-scale policy initiatives, and stakeholder inclusion. Concerning acceptable policy approaches, several themes reoccurred, namely the Tilburg approach, the New Zealand approach, and the Belgian approach. Themes revolving around smaller-scale policy initiatives indicated the inclusion of a labor inspectorate and collective labor agreement. Lastly, numerous themes reoccurred regarding stakeholder inclusion.

4.4.1. Acceptable Policy Approaches According to Participants

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10 were enthusiastic about the policy approach in the Municipality of Tilburg. The Tilburg approach towards sex work is considered a relatively ‘free model’ that is more facilitating than restrictive (Participant 3). One central aspect that these participants found advantageous was the ability of sex workers to work from home, which enabled more access to safe workplaces in the municipality (Participants 1, 3, 4 & 5). Moreover, participants 4 & 5 elaborate that this policy initiative lowers the threshold for sex workers to contact the police in cases of abuse or malpractices. They also state that it increased the visibility of sex workers as the municipality is aware of who is working from home.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, & 10 also emphasize that the Tilburg approach is beneficial because it was created in partnership with a focus group that was made up of sex workers. Participant 6 states that the policy approach is advantageous considering it effectively included all stakeholders in the policymaking process. This includes the special investigating officers (*handhaving*), police, municipality, and sex workers. Participant 6 stated that she considered a permit's price too high. In many municipalities, the cost of obtaining a permit is around €600. In Tilburg, the cost is €1492,97. Moreover, escort bureaus would need to repurchase such a permit yearly and other sex work businesses every three years. She considers this a weakness of the policy. The importance of sex workers participating in the policymaking process was also highlighted by participants 4 & 5.

Participants 1, 2, 6, 9 & 10 also referred to the New Zealand model of sex work policy. The New Zealand policy is considered acceptable, considering it sufficiently involved sex workers and sex work advocacy organizations in the policymaking process (Participants 9 & 10). However, it is also considered a good option as business operations for sex work businesses is

similar to that of any other business (Participant 9). The sex work policy approach in Belgium was also mentioned by participants 2, 9 & 10. This policy approach was also considered beneficial, considering it moves toward full decriminalization, fewer restrictions for sex workers, and more access to support (Participant 9). Participant 10 also stated that this policy approach does not differentiate sex work policy so much from other professions. The same is true for the policy relating to migrant sex workers in that it is similar to the country's policy on other migrant workers, not specifically related to the sex work sector. Participants 7 & 8 did not mention a specific policy approach they found acceptable. However, they did emphasize the need for a national, uniform policy that has allowed for a more cohesive policy approach to sex work and human trafficking.

4.4.2. Smaller Scale Policy Initiatives

Labor inspectorate, collective labor agreements

Participant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10 considers it a good initiative that sex work policy would include inspections by the labor inspectorate rather than just by law enforcement agencies. Participants 1, 3, 4, & 5 considered more involvement of the labor inspectorate beneficial based on the condition that they indeed ensure that sex workers have safe workplaces and are not used to create more restrictions for sex workers. Inspection should not just be a law enforcement effort but focus more on the labor inspectorate. Participant 3 adds that they should not be a controlling force. However, she considers that such a labor inspectorate could also have certain disadvantages we should be aware of. She states that, similarly to the situation with law enforcement officers, it is necessary to look into who is conducting such a labor inspectorate. She states that there can be significant differences between people who conduct such an inspection. One person may be more open-minded or neutral than another and might consider who the human is behind the sex worker and what type of support can be provided. So, such an inspection should consider the safety of sex workers first (Participant 6)

Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10 also favor ensuring that sex workers receive labor rights, for example, with a collective labor agreement. Participant 3 adds that it is vital that such an agreement should only be considered based on the condition that it is created (at least for the majority) by sex workers or sex worker unions themselves. She states that creating such an agreement without the target audience might form an even more significant risk to sex workers. Participants 4 & 5 have a similar view. They consider it essential that such an

agreement allows sex workers to call upon their labor rights but do not want it to restrict them in conducting their work.

4.4.3. Stakeholder Inclusion

All participants considered one matter vital to improving sex work policy both on a local and national level and increasing the position of sex workers. This connected all stakeholders within a policy region to discuss sex work policy. Every stakeholder has expertise, and connecting and discussing ideas and new trends is vital to ensuring a practical policy approach. Participants 1 & 6 also emphasized that it is beneficial if these discussions are facilitated with respect for all parties and are accessible. All participants stated that law enforcement is a necessary stakeholder to include. Participants 1, 4,5, 7, 8, 9 & 10 stated that the GGD is also an important stakeholder to include. Participants 4,5,7 & 8 also stated that it is essential to include organizations that have knowledge about (sexual) human trafficking in the policymaking process. Including such organizations is important because they can provide more insight into how sex work, extortion, and human trafficking differ. Moreover, they are important to consider when creating policy that targets both sex work and extortion and human trafficking so that there is more coherence. One such organization could be MOVIERA. However, participants also state that these efforts are often futile if stakeholders are not open to listening and adapting their behavior or policy (Participants 1, 2, 9 & 10).

Participant 1 reiterates that the government should be considered a necessary actor to improve the situation. She states the following:

“I think almost the only way to get society with their noses in the same direction is for the government to state that sex work is a legal profession more openly.”

Indeed, other participants stated the difficulties in getting all the necessary stakeholders to look in the same direction. Participant 1 considers the government as the actor with the most power to achieve this. She believes that even though the efforts of all stakeholders are vital, they can never achieve the same results the government can. Participant 2 also considers academia to be an important stakeholder. She states that academics have a different platform and might be more easily heard by the government.

This section outlined the direction participants wanted the Dutch sex work policy to move towards. Overall, participants emphasize a less restrictive policy approach that is more uniform and considers labor rights for sex workers.

4.4.4. Barriers and Potential Solutions

This analysis has outlined participants' responses regarding their acceptability of the Dutch sex work policy, the policy approaches they consider acceptable, and the challenges they encounter. In light of this, the following section will conclude the analysis by summarizing the main barriers that participants perceive throughout the policymaking process.

Participants 1,2,3,4,5,6, 9 & 10 considered the lack of normalization regarding sex work and the existence of stigmatization towards sex work as the main barriers to moving toward acceptable policy measures. Participant 1 thinks that to counter this, it is crucial to be more open about sex and more transparent about the nature of the sex work sector. Vital to this is creating awareness about the sex work sector and sex workers' experiences. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6 also consider it problematic that sex work policy, especially the Wrs, is so connected to morals rather than a pragmatic view based on logic, evidence, and proposals by the target group.

Another barrier is the difficulty that certain participants experience during interactions with municipalities. All participants consider a lack of openness from municipalities to listen to them as a barrier to creating an effective sex work policy. However, the participants also stated that these difficulties could be overcome over time. Vital to this is to continue to discuss the nature of the sex work sector within their region (Participants 7 & 8) and to lobby for a more effective sex work policy in general (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10). This process starts by making the municipality aware of the feedback they were receiving from the sex workers they spoke with, about what type of cases they were working with, making them aware of what type of situations were happening within their environment, what type of questions they were receiving from sex workers. They reiterated that it was necessary to start from the basics to ensure municipalities gained more insight and understanding into what was occurring (Participants 3, 4 & 5). Additionally, it would be beneficial if municipalities discuss these advances in their local sex work policy amongst themselves so that the policy measures may become more widespread (Participants 2, 3 & 6).

Participant 2 adds that another barrier is the outdated nature of the current (national) sex work policy. This policy does not consider the developments that occurred over the past 20 years, for example, the emergence of the internet. Moreover, it has become more restrictive towards sex workers than it was initially intended to be. The participant states that over the years, sex workers have proven creative in finding ways to continue working and have tried to innovate.

However, the current policy and the Wrs make this very difficult. She states that sex workers and sex work advocacy organizations see many opportunities for change and improvements. Still, the existing policy, the Wrs, the continued discrimination, and stigmatization prevent sex workers from being able to act on these ideas.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This research has used primary data from semi-structured expert interviews with sex work advocacy organizations to gain insight into this group's acceptability of Dutch sex work policy and their role in the policymaking process. The analysis aimed to answer the following research question: *What is the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy in the Netherlands, and what is their role in the policymaking process?*

As a result, the analysis had four main themes: acceptability towards the current sex work policy, acceptability of the Wrs, the participant's role in the policymaking process, and appropriate policy approaches.

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that the consulted sex work advocacy organizations had a low degree of acceptability towards the current sex work policy. This was related to the lack of uniformity regarding sex work policy and the high complexity of municipal sex work policy. Additionally, participants stated that a lack of safe workplaces for sex workers and the increasing stigmatization and prevalence of extinction policies are barriers that keep the current policy from being effective.

The second section of the analysis focused on acceptability toward the Wrs. It can also be concluded that overall, the consulted sex work advocacy organizations had a low degree of acceptability regarding the Wrs. This was related to concerns that the Wrs will weaken the visibility and safety of sex workers. Furthermore, the mandatory registration alongside necessary permit meetings to determine whether a sex worker is sufficiently self-reliant are considered barriers to the Wrs being effective. Moreover, there are significant worries that the Wrs will further increase the stigma toward sex workers and the sector.

The third section focused on sex work advocacy organizations' role in the policymaking process. The analysis pointed out that these organizations significantly influence local sex work policy. This is because they are in close contact with sex workers, other advocacy organizations, law enforcement agencies, housing associations, and municipalities. This section also brought to light that the organizations held different levels of trust toward government agencies. Whether an organization believed government agencies to be

trustworthy and transparent depended on the specific person they interacted with and generally also on how long their relationship had been established.

The final section of the analysis considered which policy approaches the consulted sex work advocacy organizations deem appropriate, which small-scale policy initiatives they consider necessary, and which stakeholders should be included. The policy approaches that most of the consulted organizations deemed appropriate were less restrictive than the Wrs. Rather, they focused on legalizing and destigmatizing sex work. Additionally, the section discussed the main barriers that sex work advocacy organizations perceive in achieving effective policy. The barriers related to the existence of stigma, the lack of openness from other stakeholders, a long-drawn-out policymaking process by the government, and an outdated and restrictive policy.

Based on the data, concrete measures could be identified to overcome (some) negative effects of the current sex work policy and the barriers in the policymaking process. To overcome the negative effects of the current policy, a more uniform but less restrictive national and local policy is necessary. This policy must ensure the availability of safe workplaces, combat extinction policies, and focus on normalizing sex work in all sectors.

Moreover, the restrictive and stigmatizing nature of other organizations such as banks and insurance companies should be considered. Sex workers have many ideas for creating a safer sex work sector, however, due to their restricted access to funding, insurance, and licenses, it is difficult for them to act on these ideas. Therefore, barriers in the policymaking process can be overcome by creating awareness about the sex work sector, taking a more pragmatic approach toward sex work policy, and continuing to include all necessary stakeholders in the policymaking process. Yet, this remains a difficult and time-consuming process.

5.2. Discussion and Implications

Much of the findings in this research can be connected to the literature that was discussed throughout the literature review. For example, the literature review made it clear that the legalization of sex work to reduce criminal activities, malpractices, and victimization of sex workers is only likely to be successful if regulations provide for robust oversight and monitoring in the sector and these regulations are systematically enforced (Weitzer 2017, 369). Within the Netherlands, it seems this is not the case. Both the central and local governments often lack insight into the nature and size of the sex work sector and the abuses

and malpractices that occur in it. This affects the ability of these agencies to oversee and monitor the sex work sector and implement successful policies. Moreover, sex work advocacy organizations emphasize that regulations are not systematically enforced because the current policy allows for great discrepancies. This is directly related to municipalities' ability to have differing sex work policies. Sex work advocacy organizations thus find it necessary that sex work becomes more legalized, municipalities take a more facilitating role, and more safe workplaces are ensured. Moreover, these measures should be as universal as possible across the country.

Additionally, the literature pointed out that legalizing sex work did not necessarily decrease the stigmatization of the profession (Begum et al. 2013, 97). This is also true in the Netherlands. Sex work advocacy organizations point out that it is important they continue taking de-stigmatization efforts, for example, by creating awareness amongst stakeholders and the general public. However, it is also clear that the effects of this would be more significant if the government actively worked towards destigmatizing sex work as well.

The research also made it clear that there is very low acceptability of the consulted sex work advocacy organizations regarding the Wrs. One reason for this is that they believe the Wrs is a restrictive policy approach that will decrease the visibility and safety of sex workers because it will push them to work in more illegal settings. Moreover, they believe it will increase stigma toward sex workers. This corresponds with the numerous studies that researched the effects of the restrictive Nordic model, which were discussed in the literature review. Namely, that the Nordic model generally made the living and working conditions of sex workers more difficult (Vuolajärvi 2018, 151) and that implementation of the model exacerbated issues that were already occurring in the sector (Kingston & Thomas 2018, 435).

Furthermore, the literature on public acceptability emphasizes that public resistance to a policy measure can result in policies having the opposite effect to what is intended (Bicket & Vanner 2016, 2). One aim of the Wrs is to increase the visibility of sex workers and ensure that the government has more insight into what is occurring in the sector. However, sex work advocacy organizations are concerned that sex workers who willingly conduct their profession but cannot do so legally (by being granted a permit) are unlikely to adhere to the Wrs. Instead, sex workers will likely continue to conduct their work illegally, which is contrary to the purpose of the Wrs.

Most participants were satisfied with their interactions with other sex work advocacy organizations. However, several participants did point out the importance of including sex work advocacy organizations that are occupied by sex workers or sex workers in general throughout the policymaking process. For example, as was the case in the municipality of Tilburg (Overheid.nl, n.d.). This relates to the literature highlighting one of the risks of advocacy. If one is not careful, situations can arise in which advocacy organizations speak for the target group instead of representing them. So, it is essential that advocates support the target group in gaining the tools to speak for themselves (Nyamugasira 1998, 299). For this specific case, this would require creating awareness and addressing stigmas, so that sex workers feel comfortable and safe enough to speak for themselves.

A specific gap that was identified in the literature review concerning the role of sex work advocacy organizations in the policymaking process. From the analysis, it became clear that these organizations do indeed play a central role in the policymaking process, especially on a local level. This is mainly because they are in contact with sex workers, government agencies, and other stakeholders and inform the last two on the actual nature of the sex work sector in their regions and what policy approaches are important to consider. Several examples from the analysis substantiate this finding. These are mainly related to the creation of new (local) policy initiatives in collaboration with sex work advocacy organizations.

However, achieving this type of progress is not necessarily an easy or straightforward process. Several challenges were identified. Firstly, sex work advocacy organizations are often included in the policymaking process without their suggestions actually being adopted. This is connected to one of the main pitfalls of participatory policymaking. Namely, it can be used as a tool that seems to give citizens a voice when it might only be used to legitimize decisions made by the government (Bobbio 2019, 52). Secondly, sex work advocacy organizations can influence policy. However, it often takes significant effort and time on their sides. This was related to several factors; a general lack of knowledge about the sector, the existence of stigma, and a lack of normalization concerning sex work.

These challenges affected the degree of trust that sex work advocacy organizations had in government agencies. Whether or not sex work advocacy organizations trusted government agencies and found them transparent generally depended on the specific person they were interacting with, whether or not this person was open to listening to their (policy) ideas, was willing to publicly state their support for these ideas, and continued interacting with them

over a longer period of time.

The degree of trust that sex work advocacy organizations have in local governments is higher than that of the national government. One reason is that they are in closer contact with local governments and stakeholders, and with time they have seen changes occur in these regions. So, even if it does not always have the desired outcome, they are more actively included in the policymaking process. This is not generally the case on the national level. However, this type of trust is really difficult to achieve if municipalities are not open to listening or acting on their suggestions. Moreover, this trust is not transferred to the national governments as sex work advocacy organizations do not believe they are transparent in their motives or that they will actually change their policy direction.

All in all, the analysis suggests that there are still many challenges that need to be overcome to achieve an effective sex work policy that is deemed acceptable by sex work advocacy organizations and sufficiently includes them in the policymaking process.

Overall, sex work advocacy organizations believe a less restrictive policy approach is beneficial. This means that more aspects of sex work are legalized, more safe workplaces are available, sex workers receive labor rights, and stigmatization is addressed. They do not consider the Wrs a viable policy measure to achieve this. Rather, they consider it will exacerbate the issues that are already present.

5.3. Limitations

Several limitations can be identified in this research. First is that this research specifically decided to consult expert interviews with sex work advocacy organizations and did not consult non-expert interviews with sex workers. This can be considered a limitation because there might be instances in which a sex work advocacy organization is not fully representative of the perceptions of sex workers. However, it should also be considered that this research consulted several experts who were also sex workers.

Secondly, this research provided a comprehensive overview of the acceptability of sex work policy, and the role sex work advocacy organizations have in the policymaking process. This was done purposely, considering this was a gap in the research. However, the perspectives and policies regarding human trafficking were not thoroughly considered. The research repeatedly pointed out that sex work and human trafficking are not the same matter. However, it should be kept in mind that they are connected and that this does have policy implications.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Policy Recommendations

This research provided an overview of the main issues that sex work advocacy organizations identified concerning the Dutch sex work policy. It also pointed out the main challenges they experienced in the policymaking process. The participants also provided potential solutions to tackle these issues. Based on the insights that were provided by the participants, an overview of policy recommendations is provided below.

1. Normalize sex work

The research pointed out that there is a lack of knowledge about the size and nature of the sex work sector both in government agencies and among the general public. This lack of normalization directly contributes to the unnuanced perceptions that exist of the sex work sector. Government officials, policymakers, and law enforcement agencies generally hold a certain degree of stigma toward either sex workers or the sex work sector. Addressing this is vital for creating an effective sex work policy and strengthening the position of sex workers. The government holds a critical role in this because it has a position of power. If national and local government agencies are not open to listening (and adapting their policy) to sex work advocacy organizations, this creates a direct barrier to effective policymaking.

2. Make policies based on logic & evidence

Sex work advocacy organizations emphasize that sex work policy often depends on morals and the political climate. However, this has led to either inaction by the government or the creation of policy measures that are not actually effective. Rather they emphasize that sex work policy should be based on evidence and logic. They also reiterate that to achieve this, it is vital to effectively include sex workers and sex work advocacy organizations in the policymaking process.

3. Make sex work policy less complex and more uniform

The research also highlighted that the sex work policy in the Netherlands is rather complex. There are many discrepancies between municipalities, which complicates situations. According to sex work advocacy organizations, this requires a more uniform policy approach. However, they do not consider the way the Wrs wants to

achieve this acceptable as it restricts sex workers. Rather, they propose a more facilitating approach. For example, the provision of more legal, safe workplaces, allowing sex workers to work from home, ensuring that sex workers have equal access to services, and ensuring that sex workers have labor rights. They suggest policy approaches that already exist, such as the Tilburg model, the New Zealand model, and the Belgian model.

4. *Active stakeholder inclusion*

Sex work advocacy organizations also mentioned that changing policy is dependent on the participation of all stakeholders. Of course, sex workers themselves are the most important ones to consider. However, the best results can be achieved if all relevant actors are consulted. On a local government level, sex work advocacy organizations considered the following actors important; sex workers, sex work advocacy organizations (those with a more supportive role and those with a more activist role), municipalities, law enforcement, GGD (municipal health service), organizations specifically focusing on human trafficking, and housing associations. The same actors were considered important on the national level with the addition of academics considering they might have a different platform type.

5. *Making policy change durable*

Overall, it is clear that most sex work advocacy organizations have many ideas on how to strengthen the position of sex workers and effective policy measures. In some cases, these ideas have already been adopted. However, it is also important that these changes are durable. Otherwise, they will not be effective. To achieve this, it is advisable that policy measures are established on a national level, ensuring that they are uniform.

6.2. Recommendations for Further Research

There are several matters to consider for further research on this topic. Firstly, further research should include an overview of how policy differently affects different forms of sex work. It is likely that different policy approaches will affect these forms in other ways. Acknowledging these will allow for a more inclusive policy approach.

Secondly, further research needs to focus on how the online environment affects sex work. The online environment has had a significant effect on the sex work sector. However,

the current policy and the Wrs do not consider this at all. Therefore, more insight is necessary into the influence of the online environment on sex work (policy).

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8. Appendices

8.1. Information Leaflet

Sex Work & Policy in the Netherlands

By Celine Soeter – Master Student Maastricht University/United Nations University

THE STUDY

This research will be conducted to understand the acceptability that sex work advocacy organizations have towards sex work policy in the Netherlands. The research findings will be outlined in the Master's thesis "Sex Work & Policy in the Netherlands".

This research topic came to be in response to a new policy initiative, the Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs), submitted by the Dutch government. This act addresses malpractices, abuses, and stigma in the Dutch sex work industry.

However, the act has been met with much criticism from multiple stakeholders since its introduction. Though stakeholders agree that a new policy initiative is necessary to improve the situation of sex workers in the Netherlands, they fear that, as the policy is formulated now, it will be counterproductive.

A main actor that should be considered in formulating and implementing effective policy is sex work advocacy organizations. Therefore, this research aims to include this group by studying their acceptance of sex work policy and their role in the policymaking process.

PARTICIPATION

You have been requested to participate in this research because you are a sex work advocacy organization that is active in the Netherlands, has an affinity with sex work policy, and is knowledgeable about the position of sex workers in Dutch society.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you may decide not to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. The interview will take between 45-60 minutes. The interview may be conducted online or in person, depending on your preference. The interview conversation will focus on understanding your position as a representative of a sex work advocacy organization on the existing sex work policy, the new Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs), and your organization's role as a policy actor. A voice recorder will be used if you provide consent while conducting the interview.

ANONYMITY & CONFIDENTIALITY

As a research participant, you will remain anonymous to everyone besides myself. I do not plan to collect personal data besides email addresses and names for the interview recruitment/scheduling process. To ensure that these do not become public, they will be destroyed after all the interviews have been completed. Additionally, only I will have access to the data resulting from the interviews. This data will be stored in SURFdrive.

You may withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide a reason and without any negative consequences. You may do so before and after the interview by informing me via email or phone. You may also decide to withdraw during an interview, in which case the interview will come to an immediate stop.

Information Celine Soeter

Telephone number: +31 6 29 06 87 31

Email: c.soeter@student.maastrichtuniversity.nl

8.2. Concept Information email

(Originally in Dutch, but translated into English)

Dear sir/madam,

I am Celine Soeter, a Public Policy and Human Development Student at the Maastricht School of Governance/United Nations University, who is currently writing her master's thesis about sex work policy in the Netherlands. I am specifically writing about the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards the current sex work policy and that of the proposed Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs). I am also interested in exploring the role sex work advocacy organizations hold in the policymaking process.

Up until now, there is limited research that focuses specifically on the acceptability of Dutch sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy and their role in the policymaking process. For this reason, I am searching for organizations that advocate for the well-being of sex workers and are knowledgeable about the Sex Work Regulation Act. Through interviews, I am trying to map out 1) what the acceptability of this group is towards the current sex work policy, 2) what the acceptability of this group is towards the proposed Sex Work Regulation Act, and 3) which policy changes this group perceives to be necessary, and 4) to what extent this group is included in the policymaking process. By doing this am attempting to bridge a part of the current research gap and to provide a comprehensive view of sex work policy which includes sex work advocacy organizations.

I am very interested in how [name organization] perceives aspects of Dutch sex work policy, and to which extent they are included in the policymaking process. Your vision would be valuable to understanding sex work policy and the role of advocacy organizations in creating it. Therefore, my question is whether you would be willing to receive me for an interview that would take between 45 and 60 minutes of your time. The information from the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties or published. The interview will eventually be processed in my master thesis. The interview may be conducted online through MS Teams if preferred.

I hope you can help me and I look forward to receiving your response.

Best, Celine Soeter

8.3. Concept Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to be interviewed for the master thesis research on the Sex Work & Policy in the Netherlands by Celine Soeter, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, Maastricht University & UNU-MERIT. The main project goal is to understand and outline the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy in the Netherlands.

I understand that all information collected during the study period will be kept strictly confidential and no reference to my identity will be made in the study, unless I give my permission for this (as below). I understand that I can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview at any time. I am also aware that I can withdraw consent at any time after the data collection has been completed.

The tapes, transcripts and notes from the interview will become the property of the research project and will be kept anonymous in a secured environment, without any reference to my identity. Only the Master's student will have access to the data. I understand that in addition to the master thesis, the results of this study may be published in academic journals, policy papers, or books.

- I confirm** that I have been informed of the study and the confidentiality and anonymity of this project. I understand that all data is going to be kept anonymous unless I decide to disclose my organizational affiliation and sector and/or name and position (as below). This decision is entirely up to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions I had have been addressed. I have been able to think that my participation in the study is completely voluntary. I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time without needing to give a reason.

I agree/don't agree to participate in **one or more electronically recorded interviews** for this project.

- Yes, I agree. No, I don't agree.

I agree/don't agree to **disclose my organizational affiliation and sector** for this project.

- Yes, I agree. No, I don't agree.

I agree/don't agree to **disclose my name and position within my organization for this project.**

- Yes, I agree. No, I don't agree.

Signature of Interviewee _____ Date

If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this study, please contact:

Biljana Meshkova – Supervisor

Biljana.meshkova@medinsin.uio.nl

Celine Soeter – Master student

c.soeter@student.maastrichtuniversity.nl

8.4. Concept Interview Guide

Preamble

This Master's thesis is about understanding the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy in the Netherlands. The interview questions will concern understanding the acceptability of the current sex work policy and the newly introduced Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs). It will also discuss the role of sex work advocacy organizations in policymaking.

The research participant may remain anonymous as per the informed consent form. Data resulting from the interviews will remain confidential and will only be accessed by myself. The data will be stored in SURFdrive.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you may decide not to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time. You may do so by informing me via email. You may also decide to withdraw during the interview, in which case the interview will come to an immediate stop.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Do I have permission to turn on the audio recorder?

Interview Questionnaire

Preliminary questions:

- Can you tell me a little bit more about the organization in general?
→ Sub-questions:
 - What are the organization's objectives?
 - What is the organization's purpose in relation to sex work? Can you provide examples?
 - How long has this organization worked with topics related to sex work?
 - How does this organization operate?

I would now like to go into the main themes of my thesis, which are directly related to the acceptability of sex work advocacy organizations towards sex work policy and their role in the policymaking process.

Questions about the existing sex work policy:

- Can you share your views about the current policy?
→ Sub-questions:
 - What is the organization's view on the current minimum age required to practice sex work? Can you provide an example of why you think this?
 - What about policy on sex work at home? And policy on being self-employed or under the employment of exploitants? Can you provide examples?
- How do you think sex workers cope with visibility issues in society? Can you give me examples?
- Can you talk about the stigmatization of sex workers? Can you give me examples?
- Can you talk about the safety of sex workers? Can you give examples?
- How does the current policy fit within this context?

Questions about new the Sex Work Regulation Act (Wrs):

- Can you share your views about the suggested Wrs?
- The Wrs proposes the installment of mandatory permits for all sex workers. Can you describe the organization's perspective on this? Can you give me examples in support of this view?
- The Wrs proposes that these permits may only be obtained by applicants above 21 years of age. Can you explain the organization's perspective on this?
- The Wrs proposes that these permits must be obtained through a face-to-face application meeting with a municipal officer who will decide if the applicant is sufficiently self-reliant to work as a sex worker. Can you describe the organization's perspective on this?
- The Wrs proposes that those who have working relationships (e.g. bodyguards, chauffeurs, cleaners) with sex workers who have not obtained a permit are also punishable by law? Can you explain the organization's perspective on this?
- The Wrs proposes that clients of sex workers or exploitants who have not obtained a permit are punishable by law. Can you explain the organization's perspective on this?
- The Wrs proposes that all sex workers who have obtained permits must be registered in a national register with their social security number (BSN), work number, and permit number. Can you explain the organization's perspective on this?

- Can you talk about how the Wrs can potentially influence the visibility/stigmatization/safety of sex workers?

Question about perceived necessary policy changes:

- Can you describe the organization's idea of an effective sex work policy?
- Which stakeholders do you think need to be included to achieve this effective sex work policy? Why?
- Do you perceive any other things as necessary to achieve this effective sex work policy? Why?

Questions about the advocacy organizations and the policymaking process:

- If any, can you describe this organization's relationship with other sex work advocacy organizations? Do you have examples of cooperation?
- How do you feel about your interactions with other sex work advocacy organizations?
- If any, can you describe this organization's relationship with (local/national) government agencies? Do you have examples of cooperation?
- How do you feel about your interactions with other these government agencies?
- If any, can you describe your interactions with policymakers?
- How do you feel about your interactions with policymakers?
- Can you describe how advocacy organizations may be effectively included in the sex work policymaking process?
 - a. Do you have examples of how this has happened in the past?