POLICY BRIEF & ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK

Policy Recommendations for an Equality Model in Belgium

Initiated by isala asbl with the support of: Fondation Anne-Marie Lizin · JUMP – Solutions for Equity at Work · La Voix des Femmes asbl · MEFH (Mouvement pour l'Égalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes) · Les Amies et Amis de Rosa Luxemburg · Cercle d'Histoire · European Network of Migrant Women · Maison de la Famille Willy Peers asbl · Synergie Wallonie pour l'Égalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes · Université des Femmes

Prostitution is a system of commodification of sexuality in which consent is purchased under physical, psychological, and/or economic coercion. It constitutes structural violence and systemic exploitation of precariousness, and therefore represents a grave violation of human dignity, autonomy, and fundamental human rights. Prostitution lies at the intersection of sexist, patriarchal, and economic power relations, transforming the bodies of those concerned—primarily women, who are predominantly migrant and vulnerable—into a commodity placed at the disposal of buyers. In doing so, prostitution feeds on inequality between women and men just as much as it perpetuates it. Prostitution has a profoundly negative impact on people's lives, and in particular on their physical and psychological health, which is why the 1949 New York International Convention, which Belgium has signed and ratified, deems it incompatible with human dignity.

isala urges all levels of Belgian government as well as Belgian policymakers to consider the following recommendations, within the scope of their respective competencies:

#	CORE STRATEGIC PILLARS
1.	Establish a genuine policy of protection, accompaniment, and support for people in prostitution, based on their real needs, through structured and empowering support mechanisms and exit pathways.
2.	Reform the legislative framework governing prostitution and remove sexuality from market logic. Prostitution is a form of structural violence and an exploitation of precariousness that predominantly affects women; it must be recognized and treated as such.
3.	Raise awareness, document, and train frontline professionals and civil society on the reality of the prostitution system and its impact.

1. Establish a genuine policy of protection, accompaniment, and support for people in prostitution, based on their real needs

These needs include, in particular, the granting of residence rights for foreign nationals as well as alternatives to prostitution, enabling them to live their lives in dignity and free from violence. To achieve this, the following concrete actions must be implemented:

A. Provide a transitional income during exit from prostitution

Exiting prostitution is a long and fragile process that financial insecurity frequently undermines. This dedicated income is not mere welfare assistance, but an investment in the autonomy individuals need in order to train or rebuild their lives without facing the immediate urgency of survival—which is precisely what draws people into prostitution and keeps them trapped within it.

B. Promote housing solutions and residence regularization

Providing opportunities to secure a safe roof is the first step toward breaking the physical grip of networks and pimps as well as the economic coercion binding individuals. At the same time, granting residence permits independently of any requirement to file a formal complaint with the judicial authorities brings these women out of invisibility and removes the burden of risking deportation when they report abuse. Where a complaint is filed, services must guarantee victims' anonymity and safety. By securing their legal status and housing, vulnerable targets are transformed into citizens protected by the law.

> ***"I want to find a job because this is not a normal job."***
> — Heard during internet outreach, December 2025

C. Grant a full tax amnesty for income derived from one's own prostitution

Taxation on income from one's own prostitution constitutes an additional form of violence against those subjected to it, particularly when—as is frequently the case—they are victims of exploiters. Canceling tax debts accumulated by individuals during their period in prostitution removes what is currently a major financial barrier to their reintegration and material autonomy. The urgency of repaying the tax authorities must never again be a reason for remaining in or returning to the prostitution system.

D. Create a support and compensation fund for survivors linked to the costs of harm caused by prostitution

Guarantee survivors' right to comprehensive, holistic accompaniment through access to physical and mental healthcare; trauma treatment; psychosocial support; administrative assistance; parenting support; facilitated childcare; priority access to training; and employment support. A dedicated compensation fund must also be resourced by sustainably strengthening funding for frontline organizations and survivor-led associations providing this holistic support. These measures are an integral part of the effective protection of the human rights of the persons concerned.

> ***"If I had papers, I would never come back here again."***
> — Heard on Avenue Louise, August 2025

E. Guarantee the unconditionality of social rights to break the chain of dependency

Social protection must be decoupled from prostitution activity: every person must have access to healthcare and social assistance solely on the basis of their situation of vulnerability. These rights must not be conditioned on continuing in prostitution—that is, on continuing unwanted commodified sexual acts. Unconditionality of rights is not only a requirement of justice and respect for human autonomy and dignity; it also deprives exploiters of their primary lever of blackmail and coercion, which keeps individuals trapped ever longer in vulnerability and violence.

F. Institutionalize the voice of survivors

Establish interministerial coordination committees integrating frontline organizations, and create an advisory council or reference group composed of survivors to contribute to the formulation of public policy.

G. Deploy an emergency action plan against student precariousness

Guarantee the essential conditions needed to study in dignity in response to the rise in prostitution among young people driven by material survival. This requires introducing revalued student incomes and study grants, creating university student housing (*kots*) at affordable prices, and providing entirely free access to psychological care to address the underlying trauma that facilitates pimps' control.

> ***"If I stay like this, I am going to die."***
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> — Heard during accompaniment support, 2026

2. Reform the Belgian legislative framework

Recent reforms to Belgian law regarding prostitution (the laws of 2022 and 2024, and in particular the Law of 3 May 2024) represent a major regression in human rights. Under the guise of protection, this legislation institutionalizes pimping through an employer-subordination relationship without granting any genuine new rights to the persons concerned and without imposing any accountability on sex buyers—sovereign consumers of another person's sexuality. By creating a framework conducive to exploitation and human trafficking, of which the overwhelming majority of persons in prostitution—especially migrant and precarious women—are victims, this legislation ignores their desire to exit and obstructs it. The law opens up no structural alternatives and no reintegration pathways.

It thus profoundly disregards the lived reality of people in prostitution and traps them within the system rather than enabling their autonomy. Ultimately, by institutionalizing the commodification of sexuality—principally that of women—Belgium violates the international legal standards to which it has subscribed and perpetuates a system of sexist inequality instead of addressing the root causes of demand.

To remedy this, Belgium must reform its legislation as follows:

A. Criminalize the purchase of any sexual act and repeal the "contract law" (Law of 3 May 2024)

Repeal the Law of 3 May 2024, which normalizes the exploitation of bodies and sexuality—particularly those of women—while legitimizing the ability of "clients" to rent them from third parties and pimps. Enshrine the prohibition of purchasing sexual acts in law and introduce deterrent sanctions for "clients" (such as registration on a sex offenders' register). In a society that promotes equality between women and men, sexuality must be motivated by desire. Sexual relations must be neither a duty nor an enforceable right over another person.

B. Penalize all forms of pimping without exception—including digital platforms

Repeal and revise national provisions relating to prostitution within the reform of the Sexual Criminal Code, and bring Belgium into compliance with the international conventions it has ratified. Exploiting the prostitution of another person constitutes an assault and must be recognized and punished as such. Proceeds generated through exploitation must be subject to judicial seizure and allocated to the protection, support, and accompaniment of victims.

3. Raise awareness, document, and train on the reality of the prostitution system and its impact

In order to bring about an ethical and political paradigm shift comparable to the historic abolition of other forms of exploitation, Belgium must invest fully in cultural prevention, education, and research:

A. Adapt education and prevention (EVRAS)

Promote education on gender equality and free, enthusiastic consent from school age onward as an indispensable condition for fulfilling sexuality respectful of others. Conduct large-scale, age-appropriate awareness campaigns on the devastating realities of prostitution, underlying male violence, and the recruitment mechanisms used by networks. Training must also be delivered to professionals—social workers, healthcare providers, police officers, magistrates, and others—through targeted thematic modules (welcoming victims of sexist and sexual violence, interviewing child victims, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.) in order to reduce victims' distrust, build constructive partnerships, and more effectively counter exploiters' strategies and impunity.

B. Promote appropriate public terminology

Promote factual terminology aligned with international law that respects human dignity, clearly identifies the responsibility of perpetrators and exploiters, and accurately names the serious crimes committed within the prostitution system, up to and including femicide. Prohibit—particularly in all legislative, policy, and administrative documents—proselytizing vocabulary that glamorizes or trivializes prostitution and its exploitation (such as "sex work," "sugar daddy," "lover boy," or "escort").

C. Improve research and data collection

Collect disaggregated statistical data on the prostitution system, including the profile of victims of prostitution, the profile of perpetrators (exploiters and buyers), and the economic ecosystem of exploiters and its evolution (for example, the impact of the internet and digital technologies on prostitution, the forms of violence and control experienced by victims, and the business models of prostitution platforms). Such data and knowledge are essential keys to effective public action against the prostitution system and its drivers.

ABOUT ISALA ASBL

isala works in support of people in prostitution: our volunteer teams reach out to individuals at prostitution sites, offer listening and assistance during our weekly drop-in reception, and develop holistic accompaniment plans tailored to individuals' goals and needs for exiting prostitution. **isala** offers concrete alternatives to prostitution through strategic partnerships and innovative projects within the Belgian social sector. Finally, **isala** mobilizes society by raising awareness of the reality of prostitution through training, advocacy, and public outreach initiatives.

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