

Welcome to Paradise

<http://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/welcome-to-paradise/>

When Germany legalised prostitution in 2002 it triggered an apparently unstoppable growth in the country's sex industry. It's now worth 15 billion euros a year and embraces everything from 12-storey mega-brothels to outdoor sex boxes. Nisha Lilia Diu visits some of them to find out who won and who lost.

Paradise is a brothel in Stuttgart. It's one of Germany's "mega-brothels" and, like a lot of those establishments, it has a Moroccan theme. Picture a Sultan's palace crossed with a Premier Inn, then wedge it between anonymous office blocks on an endless industrial park and you're there: Paradise.

This isn't my first time in a brothel. In Bangkok aged 19 I checked in to a place called Mango Inn with two school friends. Within a couple of hours we'd seen enough to get the joke. But that scuzzy little concern, with its scarlet-haired manager and beery tourist crowd, was seriously small fry compared to this.

Paradise is a chain, like Primark or Pizza Hut, with five branches and three more on the way. So business is booming, I say to Michael Beretin, a partner in the company. "Yes, yes!" he laughs, his £100,000 Audemars Piguet watch glinting in the light of the pierced metal lamps.

Beretin, a shamelessly flirtatious man with a grin like Jack Nicholson's Joker and a habit of slipping between English and German mid-sentence, is about to open the 15,000 square foot, 4.5 million-euro Paradise Saarbrücken. It's modelled on the Stuttgart flagship, which he invites us to visit on a day blighted by icy, spitty rain. Each of its six floors is picked out with a thick stripe of burgundy cladding making it look from the outside like a very tall, stale slice of red velvet cake. Inside, it's baking. "Take your clothes off!" cries Beretin, tugging at my coat.



It's six o'clock in the evening at Paradise and about thirty men are padding about the swirly red carpet in wine-coloured towelling robes and green plastic slippers. The women sit in the men's laps at the bar. One is cuddling up to a pot-bellied man on a day bed. Several are clustered together, looking bored in their black glitter basques and hot pink fishnets, waiting for it to get busier.

People think Amsterdam is the prostitution capital of Europe but Germany has more prostitutes per capita than any other country in the continent, more even than Thailand: 400,000 at the last count, serving 1.2 million men every day. Those figures were released a decade ago, soon after Germany made buying sex, selling sex, pimping and brothel-keeping legal in 2002. Two years later, prostitution in Germany was thought to be worth 6 billion euros – roughly the same as Porsche or Adidas that year. It's now estimated to be 15 billion euros.

Prostitution was legalised “for the government to make a lot of money,” Beretin says, strolling past a woman in a lime green lycra shrug (and nothing else) while another woman, nude except for black hold-up stockings, leans against the bar. Quite a few people agree with Beretin – and not all of them are brothel owners grumbling about their tax bills. But that isn't how the legalisation argument was won 12 years ago.

The idea of the law, passed by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Social Democrat-Green coalition, was to recognise prostitution as a job like any other. Sex workers could now enter into employment contracts, sue for payment and register for health insurance, pension plans and other benefits. Exploiting prostitutes was still criminal but everything else was now above board. Two female politicians and a Berlin madam were pictured clinking their champagne glasses in celebration.

It didn't work. “Nobody employs prostitutes in Germany,” says Beretin. None of the authorities I spoke to had ever heard of a prostitute suing for payment, either. And only 44 prostitutes have registered for benefits.

What did happen was the opening of Europe's biggest brothel – the 12-storey, neon-wrapped Pascha in Cologne. Not to mention a rash of FKK, or “naked”, clubs where men can spend the evening drifting between the sauna, the bar and the bedrooms. Bargain-hunters might try the “flat rate” brothels, where an entry fee of between 50-100 euros buys you unlimited sex with as many women as you want, or cruise the caravans at motorway truck stops, or the drive-through “sex boxes” in the street-walking zones. (They look like stables and are known as “verrichtungsboxen” - “getting things done boxes”.)



At the truck stop on Am Eifeltor near Cologne, prostitutes work out of caravans. There are around 30 caravans here. The prostitutes pay 150 euros a month in tax to the city (Albrecht Fuchs)

The Netherlands legalised prostitution two years before Germany, just after Sweden had gone the other way and made the purchase of sex a criminal offence. Norway adopted the Swedish model - in which selling sex is permitted but anyone caught buying it is fined or imprisoned - in 2009. Iceland has followed suit, and France and Ireland look set to do the same.

The Home Office insists Britain's byzantine prostitution laws (in brief: you can buy and sell sex indoors under certain circumstances) are not up for review. But that might not be the case for long.

Mary Honeyball, the Labour MEP, has been leading the charge to have the Swedish model adopted across Europe. Her bill was voted through by the European Parliament on 26 February, formally establishing the EU's position on the issue. A few days later, on Monday, a cross-party report in Britain also recommended the model.

Pressure to review prostitution laws is coming from an EU anti-trafficking directive that obliges member states to "reduce demand" for human trafficking. Given that at least 70 per cent of trafficking in Europe is into forced prostitution, a lot of people are arguing that the best way to reduce demand for trafficking is to reduce demand for prostitution. And one way to do that is to criminalise the buyer.

Sex trafficking statistics are frustratingly incomplete, but a recent report estimated the number of victims in Europe at 270,000. And Germany and the Netherlands have repeatedly ranked among the five worst blackspots.

There is "absolutely" a correlation between legalised prostitution and trafficking, says Andrea Matolesi, the programme officer for sexual violence and trafficking at Equality Now. "For a trafficker it's much easier to go to a country where it's legal to have brothels and it's legal to manage people in prostitution. It's just a more attractive environment."

She points out that Denmark, which decriminalised prostitution in 1999 – the same year Sweden made the purchase of sex illegal - has four times the number of trafficking victims than its neighbour despite having around half the population.

It's one reason the Netherlands has gone into reverse with legalisation. The Deputy Prime Minister, Lodewijk Asscher, has called it "a national mistake". As Deputy Mayor of Amsterdam he spent millions of euros buying back window brothels, turning them into shops and restaurants in an effort to rid the city of the gangs that had moved in.

Chancellor Angela Merkel attempted to raise the issue in the summer of 2013 but things got so out of hand (there were riots at conferences) that the matter was quietly dropped.

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Meanwhile, men like Michael Beretin and his business partner, Jürgen Rudloff, are getting rich. They're in high spirits about the opening of the new Paradise in April. Saarbrücken is a small city of 180,000 inhabitants that happens to be just five kilometres from the French border. It's about an hour's drive from the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The new brothel's prospects are looking better than ever. In December, the French parliament voted to criminalise the purchase of sex with fines of upward of 1500 euros for a first offence. "Thank you so much to France!" says Beretin, 48, his chest heaving with giggles inside its quilted waistcoat.

He ushers us around the Stuttgart club - the sauna, porn cinema and private function room with old episodes of Knight Rider playing on the TV. "Keep your scanners on, Kitt," says a baby-faced David Hasselhoff. Beretin spans a passing woman on her bare bottom.



Michael Beretin, a partner in Paradise Island Entertainment, which is about to open its sixth 'mega-brothel' in Germany (Albrecht Fuchs)

More than 55,000 men come to Paradise every year. Everyone – punter and prostitute – pays a 79 euro entry fee. That includes food (there is a buffet right by the Jacuzzi into which a naked middle-aged man is lowering himself) but the sex is extra. That's negotiated between the men and the women and all of the money from that activity is kept by her. The going rate at Paradise is about 50 euros for half an hour, slightly cheaper than the hammam – another extra – which is offered at 53 euros for 30 minutes.

“Prices are going down,” says Suzi, a 29-year-old Romanian who's been working at Pascha for two years. “Every day less.” Paradise is near the top of the market. Pascha is a couple of rungs lower and there are many more rungs below that. At the “sex boxes” in Cologne's Geestemünder Strasse it's possible to buy sex for as little as 10 euros. “One woman here will even do it for a Big Mac,” a prostitute called Alia told a German newspaper last year.

Germany has been flooded with foreign sex workers, mostly from Eastern Europe. Their sheer number, and willingness to accept lower rates, has driven prices so low one American punter, who takes three sex trips to Germany each year, calls the country “Aldi for prostitutes”.

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As in many German cities, Saarbrücken's sex industry really exploded in 2008 when Romania and Bulgaria were acceded to the EU. “Prostitution has reached intolerable levels here,” says Saarbrücken's mayor, Charlotte Britz. There are at least 100 brothels in the city. I walk past five in the ten minutes it takes me to get from the train station to her office. Their garish hoardings look strikingly out of place in the pretty cobbled streets.

Britz, 55, sips tea from a china cup as she recounts stories of men being approached by prostitutes in supermarket car parks and even, once, at a funeral. Residents complain about used condoms littering the bus stops their children use to go to school. “I am not OK with that,” she says.

“Saarbrücken used to be famous for its food,” a 52-year-old local called Stephanie tells me. Its candlelit restaurants were known for their fine Mosel wines. “Now it's famous for prostitution,” she says, complaining about the loutish behaviour of sex tourists at the weekend. A man in his forties with two young children describes the awkwardness of having to explain who the ladies on the side of the road are. “You don't want to answer these questions to your children when they're small.”

The law leaves Britz with her hands tied. “It's easier to open a brothel in Germany than a chip shop,” she says. That's actually true: while premises serving food need special licences there are no restrictions on brothels. That's because all they do, technically, is rent rooms. The prostitutes are their customers just as much as the punters are. Sometimes, more so.



Karina, a dancer from Latvia, has been working in Pascha's ground floor strip club for eight years. Popular acts include the on-stage shower and performances in a giant gold bird cage (Albrecht Fuchs)

"Pascha's main income is the rent we get from the girls," says Hermann Müller, the club's chain-smoking 39-year-old night manager. Müller's office is on the top floor of the brothel with a clean view of the area's slaughter-houses. There's a black leather penis-shaped stool – "a present from an artist" – and, weirdly, the skulls of 13 mountain goats mounted on the wall. His dad, who is also called Hermann Müller, is Pascha's founder.

Müller senior took the building over after legalisation but this tower block covered in blinking lights has been used by prostitutes for 40 years. It was purpose-built by the city of Cologne in 1972 in an attempt to get them off the streets, and its age and institutional beginnings show. It has the blue-and-orange colour scheme of a municipal leisure centre.

At Pascha (which Beretin calls "the shit shop") women pay 175 euros for 24 hours' use of a room. They sit on stools outside their open doors in long, dark corridors that smell of cigarettes and air freshener. Rock music is pumping. They will need to sleep with at least four men to break even.

The punters – around 1000 every day - pay 5 euros' entrance to an enormous security guard who looks like something out of Grand Theft Auto. They might visit the glory hole on the first floor or the transsexuals on the seventh. As at Paradise, the money paid for sex is negotiated directly with the prostitute and not shared with the club.

Also as at Paradise, Pascha has an on-site hairdresser. The prostitutes can get a colour for 40 euros there. "Cheaper than in the city centre," says Andersson, the camp, sweet-faced Brazilian that rents the space from Pascha's management. Pascha has a tanning and nail salon, too, as well as a self-service restaurant (run by a former prostitute called Linda) and a boutique selling glittery platform shoes and condoms in packs of 100. German lessons are free and include a one-hour tutorial in sexual practices taught using disturbingly childlike cartoons drawn by a local kindergarten teacher.

The prostitutes are not Pascha's employees, they are its customers. "In reality the brothel owner and the prostitute don't want to have an employment contract," the Frankfurt-based expert in prostitution law Guntram Knop tells me. "They want to save the social security contribution."

Both parties certainly cut their costs by eliminating health insurance and pension contributions. A lot of the women that Müller (junior) and Beretin welcome to their clubs only come to Germany for eight weeks. Some make several trips a year but few live permanently in the country, so they have little incentive to hand over a chunk of their earnings to social security. For those self-employed prostitutes who do want health insurance, premiums are high - about 500 euros a month - because it's such a risky job.

Most are in a similar situation to Suzi: her family has no idea what she's doing and she has no desire to have an official record of her years in prostitution. "This work is not for a long time," she says. "Very soon I will stop." Once she's saved up enough money, she plans to get a job in a hotel or a restaurant. Kristina Marlen, a tantric dominatrix in Berlin and a spokeswoman for Germany's Trade Association for Erotic and Sexual Services, agrees. "A lot of people just do it for a short period in their lives. They don't want to have in their CV, 'I was a whore from 2007 to 2009'."

The brothel-owner's rationale isn't purely financial either. When a journalist asked Paradise's Jürgen Rudloff if the women at his clubs are working voluntarily, Rudloff, who has four teenage children, answered, "That's not my business." Strictly speaking, he was right. As long as they're just renting rooms, the brothels have no real accountability towards the prostitutes.

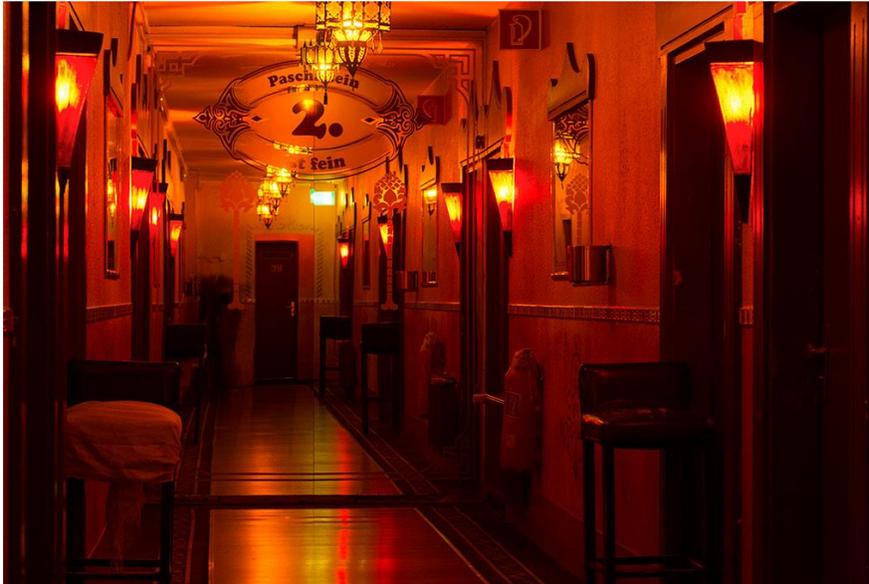
"People don't employ prostitutes in Germany because it's complicated," says Beretin, leaning back in his leather desk chair. Beside him is a framed photograph of himself standing by a Harley Davidson (Beretin owns five). On the opposite wall there's a poster of the logo of the arms manufacturer, Heckler and Koch, right under a blown-up photograph of his youngest child. Beretin is married with three sons aged 20, 18 and 9.

"You can't give orders to your employees. It's not allowed," he says. Actually, says Knop, managing prostitutes is completely legal. The problem is making sure you don't cross the line between "managing" them and "exploiting" them.

Helmut Sporer, Detective Chief Superintendent of the Crimes Squad in Augsburg, Bavaria, is one of many German policemen frustrated by the law's greyness in this area. In October, he talked at a seminar in Brussels about a "flat rate" brothel in Augsburg. "Flat rate" places pay the prostitutes for a shift, making their money from the bar and the punters' entry fees. The women working here were given strict rules: they had to be completely naked at all times and, according to Sporer, were sometimes obliged to offer unprotected sex. If they broke a rule, they had to pay a fine to the brothel. "The court declared all this to be legal," said Sporer, because the brothel owners had "right of direction" over the women - as they would over any other employee.

Nonetheless, most brothels prefer to pass on their "right of direction". Whether it's being exercised by someone else isn't really their problem. I ask Suzi if any of the women working at

Pascha have a pimp. “You know, the name is not ‘pimp’ anymore. It’s the ‘man’,” she tells me. “They call it, ‘my man’.”



A corridor in Pascha, Cologne, shows the high chairs on which prostitutes sit outside their doors, waiting for customers (Albrecht Fuchs)

If you saw Suzi outside her door she’d be wearing “a simple bra and high heels. Very, very high.” Right now she’s in a bright pink Adidas tee-shirt and black nylon tracksuit bottoms. Her voice is quiet but firm and her eye contact is fearless, breaking only when she searches for her cigarette lighter and Marlboro Lights.

Do some of the girls at Pascha have a man? “A lot of girls have a man.” Sometimes their pimp is their boyfriend, she says. “But I think that if the man loves the woman, really he cares about her, he doesn’t send her here. I think that for a good man it doesn’t matter if you make money or if you don’t make money.”

Hermann Müller’s girlfriend is a prostitute at Pascha. “But I don’t pimp her. I don’t take her money!” he says. She’s Romanian and they’ve been together for two years, “or maybe more. She’s going to kill me now if I got that wrong.” Do you mind that other people have sex with her, I ask him. “Well, if you work in this industry for so many years, prostitution becomes like a regular job.” They live together in a room at the club. I’m guessing she rents a separate room when she’s working, though? “Of course!” he says, laughing uproariously.

Suzi, who is single, spent years working as a cleaner in hotels in Italy, Spain and Greece before becoming a prostitute. “A friend who did it said it’s fast money. I cannot say easy money because it’s not easy. Anyone who thinks this is easy money is wrong.” In what way is it difficult? “You can find here all kinds of persons, difficult persons”. She squirms. “Some come with fantasies.” She tells me about a man who likes to be defecated on and another that wants to be walked around the brothel on a leash, “like a doggy”. Some men just turn up, tell her something dreadful from their childhood and leave. She finds those ones exhausting. “You know, you must be like a gum – malleable. Become whatever they need.”

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One Pascha regular is Robert. He comes two or three times a week with friends or a couple of colleagues from the pizzeria where he works. “We go first to the table dance [on the ground floor], have some fun, look at the girls and then we split off and everybody goes upstairs separately.”

There are “a lot of idiots” walking around here, Robert says, who are “drunk and disrespectful” to the women. “Like, ‘hey, bitch, I am too nice for you.’” But Robert likes it here. He feels comfortable at Pascha and thinks it’s a good thing that prostitution is legal. Before, he tells me, if men didn’t get “the fantasies they want” at home, “they go to rape a girl.”

Robert is 23. He’s an average-looking guy with a gentle manner. Sure, he’s no Brad Pitt, but couldn’t he just chat up a girl in a bar? “It’s easier here. You spend your money, you know what you get. You don’t have to talk about anybody or anything.”



Robert has noticed “a few girls” at Pascha who seem unhappy. What would he do if he thought someone was being forced? “I couldn’t do anything. I just wouldn’t go with her in the room.”

His attitude is not unusual. Barbara Birkhold in the Stuttgart Police Department tells me that men contact the police “far too rarely” about women they think might be being coerced. “They are often more scared that it will become known that they used prostitutes.”

Myria Vassiliadou, the EU anti-trafficking co-ordinator, tells me about a Nigerian woman she met recently in London. This woman was trafficked to Britain where she served up to 20 clients a day. “She was telling these clients that she didn’t want to be there, that she was forced and that she would be killed if she didn’t do what the traffickers said. She told the men and the men would say, ‘I don’t care. I paid for this.’”

Forced prostitution comes in many guises. Some women are kidnapped, others are tricked with the promise of jobs as nannies or waitresses. Others choose to work as prostitutes but have no idea of the conditions that await them. Often, a woman's pimps or traffickers are people from her own town. They know where her family lives and aren't afraid of harming them in order to control her. Sometimes it's the families who pressure girls into prostitution in the first place - unable, or unwilling, to think of another way for a woman to earn a living.

Hermann Müller knows that some of the women working in Pascha have pimps, "but [the pimps] are not allowed to come in the club," he says. If a woman asks them for help, they put her in touch with the police. "Two weeks ago," he says running his hands over his close-cropped hair, "a girl said to our manager that some guy wanted to have money from her because he drove her from Romania to Germany. And then he wanted to have money from her every week or something." Pascha called the authorities and the girl went with them. Müller's not too sure where.

Hopefully, she wound up somewhere like Solwodi. Lea Ackermann is the "foundress" of Solwodi, a charity with 16 counselling centres and seven shelters in Germany for victims of sex trafficking or forced marriage. She's travelled the world with her work and exudes warmth, kindness and wisdom. It's like talking to a Disney grandmother, only one who is telling the most terrible stories.

She tells me about a 17-year-old Russian - let's call her Klara - whose father had fallen ill. The family was getting desperate for money so when Klara saw a newspaper advert offering temporary work as a prostitute in Germany, "she thought, 'it will be awful but for three months I can bear it.' And then she was raped by several men the night she arrived to "get her ready" for prostitution. They took her passport. There was another girl there who wouldn't do something a customer wanted and they broke a bottle, a glass bottle, and raped her with that. She was cut inside. It was shown to all the others." Klara was trapped there for four years.

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Herbert Krauleidis, the owner of Gesext.de, is talking me through his website on a huge screen in his light-flooded boardroom in Stuttgart. Gesext is basically eBay for sex: people (mostly women) post pictures of themselves and a description of what they're open to and other people (mostly men) bid for them.

The site makes about 10m euros a year from its 15% cut of the sale price. Krauleidis, 59, is currently in talks with investors about expanding Gesext to "countries with laws that allow it, like Austria, Spain, Switzerland and the UK."



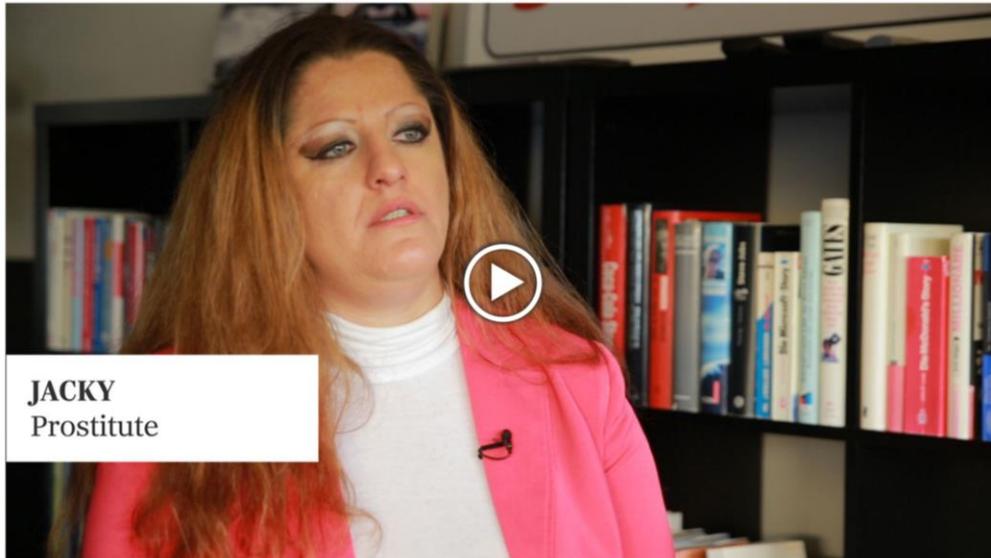
Gesext features a mind-boggling array of categories from slaves to gang bangs via nude cleaners. The biggest earners are virgins (Gesext asks for proof from the girl's doctor); one 19-year-old from Hanover sold her virginity for 17,800 euros. Men selling themselves to women fare worst. As Krauleidis, 59, browses the site, I spot one: "Hallo Lady", a tanned middle-aged man posing on a sail boat, has just sold for 80 euros.

"Hallo Lady," runs his blurb. "Would you like to be treated as a woman and get lustful joyful feelings and orgasms like you haven't had in a long time? Feel free to call me, I'm going to make you feel like a real woman. I'm 52, 175cm tall and I can go for a long time. We should meet around Munich."

"The men aren't good for business," says Krauleidis mildly. "Even in the sales they don't sell much." Gesext's office is so close to Paradise that I can see its red stripes on the other side of the autobahn. But Krauleidis and Michael Beretin couldn't be more different. Krauleidis, with his well-polished Mercedes, fluffy balding head and bookshelf of businessmen's biographies (Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Jack Welch), reminds me of the owner of a successful regional chain of shoe shops. Except the owner of a regional chain of shoe shops probably wouldn't have a personalised number plate reading "SEX 69".

One of the women on his site is Jacky, 36, a single mother from Stuttgart who works in a bistro. Her 15-year-old daughter lives with Jacky's parents, but everyone's your neighbour on the internet and she soon discovered that her mother was selling sex online. What does her daughter say about it? "She doesn't ask much about it. But I buy her presents. Last year I paid for a trip to England so she could learn the language. And now she's going to get a smartphone, I think an iPhone. She always gets the newest one."

Jacky has seen about 100 men over two years, making 100-150 euros each time. She's had a 76-year-old client die of a heart attack during an appointment. It was, as Jacky puts it, "horrible for his wife".



On Gesext, whoever places the highest bid is the man Jacky has to meet. Would-be bidders register with their full name and address and that, along with an informal ratings system, is the sum total of Gesext’s safeguards. Krauleidis is launching a new mobile app in April called “Touch & Sex”. His press officer is describing it to me, “so you check into a hotel and look at your smart phone, you choose a woman,” – “like a pizza,” Krauleidis interrupts, absent-mindedly scrolling through his emails.

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Back in Paradise, I notice a copy of Emma magazine in Beretin’s office. It’s run by Alice Schwarzer, an old school German feminist who published a petition calling for a ban on prostitution last year signed by almost 100 celebrities, politicians and academics. Since then, there have been a number of counter-petitions from sex worker unions in Germany and, as the debate has spread, elsewhere in Europe.

Schwarzer went quiet in January when she got embroiled in a scandal involving a Swiss bank account. “She hates me,” says Beretin jovially. “I would smack her in the face but she’s smacked herself in the face already.”

Beretin knows the law is full of holes, though. “The law wasn’t thought through well enough 12 years ago. It’s not strong enough and it’s going to be stricter.” Some politicians are trying to introduce brothel licences and ban “flat rate” offers. Others want to criminalise punters who buy sex from a coerced prostitute.

The standard argument against increasing regulations is that it will push prostitution underground. But, as Simon Haggstrom, an officer in the prostitution unit of the Stockholm Police, observes, “If a sex buyer can find a prostituted woman, the police can do it.”

Herbert Krauleidis is the only person I speak to who is completely at ease with the law as it stands. “Oh, my colleague!” trills Beretin when I mention Gesext to him. “It’s a big problem that women can sell themselves on the internet. You can’t control if it’s really a woman alone or if there’s a man in the background. It’s too dangerous, the internet.” Beretin thinks (of course) that “bigger clubs are a much better way to control the business. Easier to regulate.”

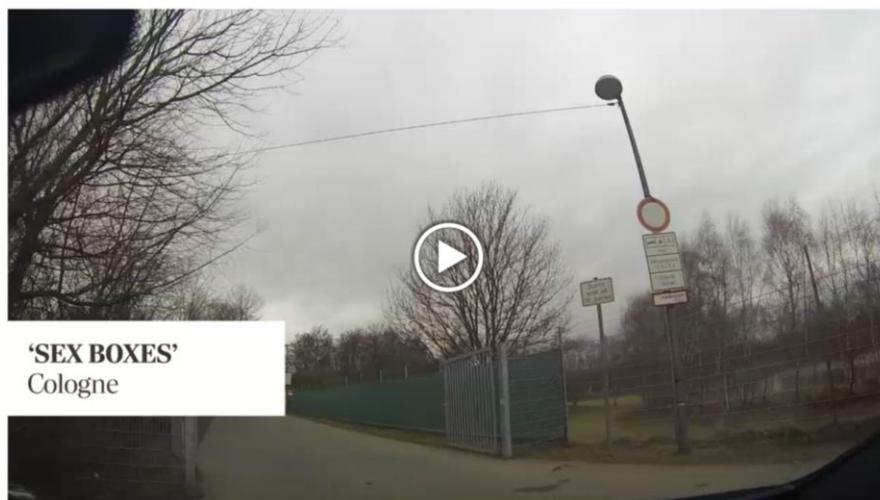
That’s debatable, but at least clubs like Paradise and Pascha have onsite security which gives prostitutes a safe environment in which to work. “Prostitutes are undoubtedly the most vulnerable group of people in society,” says Chris Armitt, the national police lead for prostitution in England and Wales where around 80,000 prostitutes work.

Armitt’s Merseyside force has an excellent record when it comes to punishing crimes against prostitutes. Since 2006, it has stopped arresting streetwalkers (even though soliciting is illegal in Britain) and started working with them instead. “The sex workers will tell us, ‘there’s a girl being pimped and she’s had her passport taken,’ and that information gets to us quickly and we’re able to act.”

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It’s a gloomy day and the clouds hang heavy above the “sex boxes” on Cologne’s Geestemünder Strasse. It’s an incredibly depressing place. Tucked behind some trees, amid the chugging machinery of a steel works and the smoking chimneys of a rubbish incineration plant, is a small loop of road fenced off by barriers.

Behind them is a series of miniature bus stops sitting against a ribbon of green tarpaulin. It’s feeble shelter on this wind-whipped day. The women hover around the bus stops, blowing their noses and pulling on woolly gloves. If and when a man selects them they’ll get in to his car and drive to a row of pastel-coloured "boxes" - that look like somewhere you’d keep cattle.



The boxes are completely bare inside apart from a panic button. The partition is hard against the drivers' side so he can't open the door and there's a clear space on the passenger side to enable a quick escape. "These women are fighting for their survival," says Sabine Reichert, a social worker with SkF Cologne, the Catholic women's group that runs the "sex boxes". "Some are funding their drug use. Others use drugs so that their work will be more bearable for them." Between 30 and 50 of them come here each day.

One of them, a skinny lady in her 50s with a low ponytail, looks like someone you'd see doing the supermarket shop, her Mazda 2 parked outside. Others look ravaged. A puffy-faced blonde waggles her fingers at a passing van, her enormous breasts popping out of her stretchy top. It's lunch hour and the road is busy. When a policeman stops our car for a few minutes a queue forms behind us.

The policeman wants to know why our male photographer has brought two women in to the area. Is he a pimp? I'm heartened by this until Reichert points out that most pimps aren't stupid enough to drop their girls off at the gate.

The women at Geestemünder Strasse are the lucky ones. The social workers invite them into the neighbouring drop-in centre to warm up and slowly build up trust. They start with hot drinks, condoms and clean needles and move on to housing, jobs and legal aid. "We strengthen the women in their self-esteem," says Reichert. The streetwalkers working in Germany's autobahns, parks and forests don't even have this.

The fact is, prostitution is not a job like any other. You're in daily physical danger, your health is at risk, it's difficult to have a relationship and, as you get older, you're left with dramatically diminished earning potential and little to recommend you to an employer.



A prostitute prepares for an evening's work in the dressing room at Pascha, a mega-brothel in Cologne (Albrecht Fuchs)

All the sex workers I spoke to, in Britain and in Germany, told me it's "not for everyone." Kristina Marlen, the Berlin dominatrix, sees her work in terms of "celebrating the sexual part of

the person” (though “sometimes people come in and I am like ‘Ew’. But I can work with them.”) She’s bisexual and currently in an open relationship with a woman. She thinks of prostitution as its own kind of “sexual orientation”.

But, she says, “there are some people working in the sex industry who shouldn’t be there.” Sex workers can find themselves in “very precarious positions and not all the women can articulate themselves as I can.” Even she has had “moments in which it wasn’t clear to me how to communicate boundaries.” You need to be thick-skinned and good at negotiating with strong boundaries and high self-esteem. There isn’t much of what’s been called “willing supply”.

Back in 2002, the liberal left imagined a sex industry in which responsible managers would push out exploitative pimps. Empowered prostitutes would work in safety and the money from this hitherto black market would go into pension pots and the German treasury. Well, they got their taxes.

Paradise’s Jürgen Rudloff appeared in a documentary, “Sex - Made in Germany”, which aired on the German public broadcaster ARD last summer. In one scene he’s sitting in his spacious kitchen dressed in an open-necked white shirt and linen jacket, surrounded by his four shiny-haired, privately-educated children.

Would he be happy for either of his two daughters to work at Paradise, the interviewer asks. Rudloff turns puce. “Unthinkable, unthinkable,” he says. “The question alone is brutal. I don’t mean to offend the prostitutes but I try to raise my children so that they have professional opportunities. Most prostitutes don’t have those options. That’s why they’re doing that job.” He pauses and looks away.

“Unimaginable”, he repeats. “I don’t even want to think about it.”

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