

# You don't have to put on that red light

A frame analysis of the European Parliament's position on prostitution  
2014–2021.

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# Abstract

Prostitution, a policy issue outside of European Union (EU) competence, has in recent years made its way onto the agenda of the European Parliament (EP). In 2014, the resolution on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality was published in which the EP stated that prostitution is incompatible with human rights. However, the other EU institutions remain reluctant to mention the topic, regarding it as a matter for the member states. This thesis examined how the EP has come to position itself against the legal status of prostitution despite it being outside of EU competence, examining the timespan of 2014–2021. Aiming to understand how non-competence issues are raised onto the supranational agenda of the EU, this thesis adopted both a structural and actor-focused theoretical framework, utilizing agenda setting theory and Europeanization together with theories on norm entrepreneurship and velvet triangles. The empirical material, consisting of EP documents, was decoded into frames that were thereafter categorized into six larger groupings. The analysis found that the position expressed in the 2014 resolution has since been consistently reaffirmed and strengthened in the EP, creating a hegemonic “European stance” on the topic. While the other EU institutions remain silent on the issue, the EP constantly attempts to raise the issue of prostitution higher on the agenda through issue-linking between prostitution and areas of existing EU competence, to influence the EU decision-making process as well as the member states to revise their regulatory stance.

Keywords: Agenda Setting, Europeanization, European Parliament, Frame Analysis, Norm Entrepreneurs, Prostitution, Sex Work.

Words: 19 578

# Table of Abbreviations

EC	European Community
EU	European Union
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
ESWA	European Sex Workers Rights Alliance
EWL	European Women's Lobby
CFR	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
FEMM	Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
GUE/NGL	The Left in the European Parliament
ID	Identity and Democracy
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MS	Member State
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
UN	United Nations
VAC	Violence Against Children
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organization

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# 1. Introduction: A position without competence

[...] prostitution and forced prostitution are forms of slavery incompatible with human dignity and fundamental human rights. (Honeyball resolution 2013/2103(INI))

The regulation of prostitution has a complex history, and as a topic of politics, it occupies a strong moral dimension, easily leading to value conflicts on both societal and political levels (Foret & Rubio Grundell 2020: 1798). Today, prostitution in Europe may most closely be synonymous with the two different regulations in the Netherlands or Sweden. One has fully legalized all aspects of prostitution, whereas the latter has created a new precedent in the attempt at abolishing prostitution with the decriminalization of sellers and the criminalization of buyers (hereinafter neo-abolitionism). Both of these models of legislation have been described, by scholars, as pioneers in their respective regulatory approaches based on arguments often derived from similar lines of thought such as; constituting steps toward more gender equality and lessening the prevalence of human trafficking (Kilvington et al. 2001, Outshoorn 2001, FREE Network 2020). How is it that two different legislative approaches claim to yield the same result? The answer may lie in the fact that the area of prostitution and prostitution policy has a substantial lack of reliable data in the field (Wagenaar et al. 2017: 54).

What makes prostitution policy unique is that changes in regulation take place in a largely evidence-free environment. The driver for most European countries when regulating prostitution is and has instead been rooted in discourse (Wagenaar 2018: 45–46). At a national level, prostitution policy is to an equally great extent shaped by laws that are tangential to prostitution as it is by laws that are directly related to the policy (2018: 190). Hence, issue-linking is very prominently found in the discourse surrounding prostitution and is expected to impact the outlook on what the problem of prostitution is perceived to be. A steady development in networks of government agencies and civil society organizations has created transnational ties which, since the 1990s, has rendered prostitution a supranational issue, and as such, it has become not only a national concern but a European concern (Foret & Rubio Grundell 2020: 1799).

In the European Union (EU), prostitution fall outside of EU remit as it is not a conferred competence in the Treaties, and any reference made to prostitution is most commonly framed as a matter for the member states (MS) legal regimes to address (Allwood 2018: 132). The Commission and the Council of the European Union view prostitution as a separate issue to for example trafficking or sexual exploitation which fall under the competence of the union, showing great reluctance to discuss the issue at all – resulting in agenda dismissals or silencings as a method of ensuring the issue stay off the EU agenda.

However, this does not equal non-intervention, the EU is still able to through other means establish a normative position (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 58). The European Parliament (EP)

has continuously since the mid-1990s made remarks on the issue of prostitution, and through soft law, i.e. legally non-binding instruments, expressed a preference on a legislative approach – taking a step away from ambivalence to adopting an explicit view of prostitution as violence against women and a driving force for trafficking in human beings (Rubio Grundell 2021a: 426). This was in large part due to the successes of prominent actors as represented by Swedish members of the EP, and civil society actors calling to the feminist dimensions of the topic, claiming that, if left to national discretions, it would undermine the EU rule of law (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 66). Consequently, a Europeanized discourse on prostitution has emerged (Outshoorn et al. 2015: 168), which in 2014 culminated in the *Resolution on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality*, also known as the Honeyball resolution. The resolution suggested that the EU member states should decriminalize selling sex while criminalizing the buyer, emulating the Sex Purchase Act from Sweden (Outshoorn 2018: 451). Although constituting a non-binding act, the implementation of the Honeyball resolution signified a clear normative stance with the EP stating that “prostitution violates human dignity and human rights, whether it is forced or voluntary” (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 61).

In September of 2021, the EP Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) released the report *The differing EU Member States’ regulations on prostitution and their cross-border implications on women’s rights* reiterating the same messages found in the 2014 Honeyball resolution. In the report, legislative suggestions are presented that reiterate the call for MS to harmonize their legislation with the motivation that asymmetries in regulations may result in more international crime, such as trafficking in human beings (European Parliament 2021a: 39). Currently (December 2022), an own-initiative procedure has been launched by the EP to process the 2021 report into a possible future resolution (European Parliament 2022). The release of the report epitomizes the view of neo-abolitionism having obtained a status-quo position as the preferred regulatory approach in the EP on a topic which in Europe is more heterogeneous, some viewing it as a matter of high moral importance versus the more technical view of it as an economic issue (Foret & Rubio Grundell 2020: 1803).

Although the existence of prostitution on the EU agenda is limited to the EP, the framings are constant attempts at advancing prostitution into the competence of the EU. Since competence is not fixed, but rather subject to interpretation, it can be viewed as being in a continuous push-and-pull relationship with new issues, falling either within or outside its remit (Allwood 2018: 132). What has led to prostitution existing outside of EU competence and yet inside the EP agenda? How has the issue been raised in recent years, and what accounts for the issue’s salience? How has neo-abolitionism become solidified as the most desirable prostitution policy? This thesis will offer a comprehensive analysis of how the European Parliament has positioned itself as neo-abolitionist concerning the issue of prostitution, a policy area in which no European Union institution has formal competence, and how the frames are used today.

In order to map out how prostitution has emerged on the agenda, this thesis applies frame analysis to derive argumentative contexts from the mentions of the topic in formal EP texts. Furthermore, a theoretical framework consisting of agenda setting and Europeanization, as well as more actor-focused theories such as norm entrepreneurship and velvet triangles, is used to determine the successes and failures of frame institutionalization. Throughout, possible contemporary world events are considered to trace the development of prostitution's presence on the agenda and possible exogenous forces.

When discussing prostitution, language use plays a large part, as the issue is divided when it comes to terminology. The two most basic terms “prostitution” and “sex work” each suggest an underlying moral position (Wagenaar et al. 2017: 33). The term prostitution is, in the current debate climate, most often used by advocates of criminalizing prostitution, either in its entirety (abolitionism) or criminalizing the buyer but not the seller (neo-abolitionism). Whereas sex work is more frequently used to highlight the labor aspect of prostitution and so is most often used by parties hoping to decriminalize and legalize sex work. Henceforth, this thesis will use the terminology present in the related literature, interchanging between sex work and prostitution as the author finds pertinent. However, the author does not wish to advocate for an abolitionist or a legalizing perspective.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Question

Developing from the analysis of Lucrecia Rubio Grundell (2021a), this study aims to expand on their findings by examining the current contemporary gap in the time frame of 2014–2021. The overall objective of this research is to understand *how* the neo-abolitionist approach has yielded success in agenda setting within the European Parliament, attempting to explore the factors through frame analysis, whilst also explaining the underlying reasons as to *why* it has led to an explicit positioning by the EP, through applying the theoretical framework. Through investigating reports, resolutions, and advocacy statements, an outline of successful and unsuccessful frames, coalitions, and actors will be mapped out to gauge the agenda setting progress and possible competence spill-over.

Using theories on agenda setting, Europeanization, and norm entrepreneurs to explore prostitution as an area attempted to be framed within the body of EU competence, this thesis poses two research questions:

1. How has the issue of prostitution been framed in the European Union context between 2014–2021, and which framing technique is most prominent with abolitionists contra sex work rights supporters?
2. Since the area of prostitution is outside the scope of EU competence, how does the European Parliament utilize the existing frames to address the issue at an EU level?



## 1.2 Delimitation

The time period selected has been chosen based on two significant publications: the Honeyball resolution of 2014 and the 2021 EP study *The differing EU Member States' regulations on prostitution and their cross-border implications on women's rights*. This choice is strategically based on two of the most influential documents in the prostitution debate in the European Union thus far. Furthermore, these two publications most clearly state the European Parliament's position on the question of prostitution. Influenced by previous research, notably Gill Allwood (2018) and Lucrecia Rubio Grundell (2021a, 2021b), this thesis aims to expand on the existing literature by conducting a contemporary analysis of the issue wherein the chosen period is yet to be explored.

One factor which affects the chosen time period is the elections to the European Parliament, which are held every five years. The last two elections, 2014 and 2019, coincide with the chosen analysis time frame, 2014–2021. With the new Members of the European Parliament (MEP) there is an expected change in political composition which might have implications for the continued discussion of a given issue. Due to the fact that a new term of political composition is present after 2019, e.g. with the presence of the new far-right EP group Identity and Democracy (ID) some political implications might be visible. Although, with the empirical material at hand for this thesis no clear parallel has been drawn between the issue's presence/ absence and the elections. Therefore this will not be explored in further detail. Conducting an analysis that stretches over two election terms does not have any implications for the analysis in terms of validity – rather it is expected to add a valuable dimension to the development of the visible frames over time, measuring the salience of the issues institutionalization as well as both effectiveness and actor effect.

## 2. Background: Prostitution in the European Union – a piece of the institutional puzzle or a square peg in a round hole?

In the pursuit to understand how a policy area outside formal EU competence has kept its place on the agenda within the EP while not being affirmed nearly anywhere else in the institutional structure, this thesis analyzes the empirical material with the ambition to find the contemporary motivations for this fact. The posed research questions in essence boil down to motivations by the prevalent actors in the setting of the Parliament. In order to properly shed light on the results, this chapter outlines the development of the scope of competence following the Lisbon Treaty, the place of prostitution policy in the EU context, and the current state of play concerning the member states legislative stance on prostitution. The end of this chapter also notes the literary developments in the field.

### 2.1 The EP as an institutional actor

The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) substantially increased the EU jurisdiction and scope of action, and with it, the competences of the EU were defined by a system of being either exclusive, shared, or supported. With the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament also expanded significantly through attaining co-decision power with the Council of the European Union, henceforth “the Council”. Furthermore, the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) attained a legally binding status under article 6 in TEU, widening the EU’s gender equality *acquis* and becoming an important part of the EU’s visions of increased harmonization (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 23). The evolution of gender issues in the EU can often be traced to the EP as an early responder, largely due to the institution’s close relation to civil society groups. For example, presence in Parliament committees and hearings may lead to external actors possessing agenda setting power, often with the goal to Europeanize public discourse. This can for example be seen in the construction of so-called velvet triangles and the shaping of feminist thinking in the EU, including the connection between gender equality and prostitution (2022: 25).

The existing competences set out in the TFEU confers competence to the EP and the Council under article 83 to by means of directives establish minimum rules and sanctions in areas of crime with a cross-border dimension, including but not limited to trafficking in human beings (THB) and sexual exploitation of women and children. As a result, links between prostitution, which is outside of EU competence, and THB and sexual exploitation, which is inside of EU competence, is a common strategy when attempting to place prostitution on the agenda through the means of framing (Allwood 2018: 132). The power balance between the EP and the Council, and Commission has been shown to affect the probability of an issue going from the agenda to a decision. With the current state of play, even though EP has the power of co-legislator, if an issue is solely on the EP’s agenda, it is regarded as unlikely to reach EU decision-making (ibid).

The most influential publication on prostitution in the EU realm is the Honeyball resolution, which was a milestone for the abolitionists in condemning prostitution and successfully tying prostitution to the EU agenda and stronger EU legislation, namely the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000). The resolution passed in 2014, with 53% of the MEPs voting in favor. However, since the Honeyball resolution, prostitution has yet to reach the same level on the agenda again. Joyce Outshoorn (2018: 452) has reflected on the viability of the continued strategy of abolitionists, oftentimes drawing upon trafficking and violence against women to maintain the EU's attention on discussing prostitution. There maintains several institutional barriers for prostitution to be able to realistically enter the policy process; the issue of Treaty formulated competences, the veto power of the European Council, the EP's incomplete power, and the EP's elections routinely changing out the MEPs, including possible key actors involved in the driving the issue (2018: 453).

On the other hand, Sharron FitzGerald and May-Len Skilbrei (2022) have discussed how the EU's work with gender and sexuality has evolved through the harmonization of policies across the Union, especially after the Treaty of Amsterdam cemented gender equality as a European value. The discussions on what norms are positioned inside versus outside the notion of Europeanness reveal how Europeans negotiate their identities, which in turn defines what is included and excluded in the EU political sphere (2022: 10). This may have expected effects on how the EP has been affected by the historical attempts at Europeanizing prostitution discourse, mainly neo-abolitionist discourse, and how the institution acts today when attempting to keep it on the agenda regardless of continued silence from the Commission and Council. One hypothesis is that the discourse surrounding prostitution becomes symptomatic of a variety of issues, and thus may constitute a case of the difficulties of declaring what fits inside EU competence and what does not.

## 2.2 Prostitution policy in the EU: historical development

Often referred to as the “oldest profession”, the history of prostitution in Europe is extensive. By the end of the nineteenth century, all European states governments are said to have been involved in regulating the sex trade (Wagenaar 2018: 42). Public policy, regardless of its formulation, may be viewed as an expression of government intent, which implies a moral relationship between the individual and the state (Wagenaar et al. 2017: 6). As described in the previous sub-chapter, this fact places a substantial opportunity of normative power in the hands of a policy-making entity whether it nation-state or supranational institution. Arguably, prostitution policy's greatest challenge is its archetypal moral nature which hinders the possibility of concerted action as it is on the extreme axis of moral contestation (2018: 38). This section will briefly describe the main developments which have affected how prostitution has been framed historically and its presence on the EU agenda.

Prostitution in Europe has been raised as a political issue historically, but Greggor Mattson (2016: 5) describes the current engagement with prostitution politics as a “second wave” of activism. A claim that he attributes to three facts: the presence of more women with political power, a stronger involvement of civil society organizations, and enhanced policy polarization (ibid).

The first attempts at actively placing prostitution on the EU agenda were made in the 1980s. A reported rise in trafficking prompted inquiries by the Commission on prostitution, thus framing prostitution from the very start as violence against human rights (Outshoorn 2018: 443). Up until the early 2000s, prostitution debates in the EU was dominated by the linkage between prostitution and trafficking, a link that was fundamental for abolitionists in their attempts to fortify prostitution on the EU agenda (Hubbard et al. 2008: 148). Instead, commonly used terminology like “forced prostitution” opened up a discussion of the existence of the opposite concept of “voluntary prostitution”. Thus, in a roundabout manner, the persistent linking between prostitution, trafficking, and violence against women enabled the discursive emergence of the sex work-frame when the implied existence of prostitution by choice was established (Outshoorn 2018: 452). This inherently polarized the two sides in relation to what *the problem* of prostitution is. According to FitzGerald and Skilbrei (2022: 53) abolitionists and namely Swedish femocrats utilized this fluidity of problematization as a so-called moving target. In order to emphasize the need for state action they fit the social meaning strategically inside whatever puzzle was presented. Pushing prostitution to be perceived as a structural rather than an individual problem.

Further, the structure of the two main positions in the debate distinguishes themselves not only by moral conviction but even down to language use differing between “prostitution” and “sex work” which furthered the diametrical view of forced versus voluntary prostitution (Foret & Rubio Grundell 2020: 1806). Two nations that most famously illustrate this diametric relation are the legislative approaches of Sweden and the Netherlands, both of which have become advocates for their respective approaches. What solidified the polarization of the debate between pro-legalizers and abolitionists were the two nations' reforms, both in the year 1999: the Netherlands deciding to fully legalize sex work, recognizing it as an occupation, and Sweden in the same year intending to abolish prostitution, initiating the criminalization of purchasing sex (Mattson 2016: 7). As a result, a wave of prostitution reform swept through Europe, and Mattson (2016: 10) attributes this to the creation of conceptual clarity in national views of prostitution. Previously, regulation on prostitution had not only differed on national levels between MS but also on regional levels. These legislations brought about two separate and distinct views on how to construct a single national standard. As a result, in the following years, several European countries altered their legislation on prostitution: Iceland (2009), Norway (2009), Ireland (2014), and France (2016) to follow the Swedish model (Erikson 2019: 23), along with Denmark (1999), and Germany (2000) inspired by the Netherlands (Mattson 2016: 9).

Due to the complicated structure and institutional design of the EU, both formal and informal actors have adapted their framings on prostitution to fit it inside the scope of EU competences, with varying success (Outshoorn 2018: 452). Despite this, no formal policy has ever been developed on the issue. Though the EP in more recent years has utilized soft law measures through publishing resolutions, such as the Honeyball resolution, the legislative status of a resolution is non-binding, and therefore member states are not required to take any action to implement it. However, whereas no formal legislation or other decision-making has occurred, the cases of symbolic power use are more noticeable, which may spur MS to take action to follow suit in their domestic laws, such as implementing the *Nordic model* (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 6). The continued trends, touching upon issues of national identity politics and how the EU may promote the “correct” version of European values, and national sovereignty weighed against the value of harmonized ideals, have been and continue to be shaped by such frame attempts. The more contemporary attempts of which will be the focal point of the analysis.

### 2.3 Current state of play

The member states' current government legislative position on prostitution has been categorized into two overarching groups by the EP: legislation and prohibition. To avoid confusion on language use, as both prohibition and regulation are legislative stances, this thesis will, in this chapter, utilize the terminology: decriminalized and prohibited.

Decriminalized prostitution has two subgroups of legal status: regulated or unregulated, whereas prohibition can be divided into three subgroups depending on who is attributed the penal burden; the sex worker, the client, or both. Illustrated in Table 1 is a simplified model of all 27 member states' regulations on prostitution, as of 2021. The countries marked with an asterisk (\*) imply that there is legislation in place that criminalizes a client purchasing a sexual service from a trafficked victim.

To summarize the categorizations, some clarifications are needed. The member states categorized under Model 1a: Regulated, notably differ in what conditions of regulation apply in said member state. For example, regulations may be related to permitted venues for business, health and safety requirements, or other general conditions to offer sexual services (European Parliament 2021a: 23). Generally, member states with decriminalized prostitution under Model 1, often possess a non-homogenous regulatory approach between national legislation and regional and/or local application through by-laws or regional ordinances. For example, in the Netherlands the municipalities maintain a license issuing right for brothels, a system which some smaller municipalities have utilized to discourage any licenses at all, in a roundabout way prohibiting prostitution businesses under legalized pretenses (Weitzer 2021: 56).

When observing the division between decriminalization and prohibition, it is interesting to note that the vast majority of EU member states operate under, regulated or unregulated, permitted

prostitution. Looking at the history of the up-loading norm diffusion by Swedish feminists of the neo-abolitionist approach into the EP, it is clear that the EU institution’s attempted position and soft law influences have not yet reached a sufficient level of down-loading to the member states. The juxtaposition of the EP’s clear position and the majority of the member states legal framework of prostitution incites the question of *why* this state of play has been established, which this study will aim at answering.

<b>Model 1: Decriminalization</b>		<b>Model 2: Prohibition</b>		
<b>Model 1a Regulated</b>	<b>Model 1b Unregulated</b>	<b>Model 2a Punishing the sex worker</b>	<b>Model 2b Punishing the client</b>	<b>Model 3a Punishing both parties</b>
Austria Germany* Greece Hungary Latvia Netherlands	Belgium <sup>1</sup> Bulgaria Cyprus Czech Republic Denmark Estonia* Finland* Italy Luxembourg* Malta Poland Portugal Slovakia Slovenia Spain	Croatia* Romania*	France Ireland Sweden	Lithuania
6 MS	15 MS	2 MS	3 MS	1 MS
<b>21 MS = 77,8% of EU-27</b>		<b>6 MS = 22,2% of EU-27</b>		

Table 1: Models of regulation on prostitution in EU member states as of 2021.

*MS = Member state. \* = Criminalising clients purchasing sexual services from trafficked victims.*

*Source: European Parliament 2021a: 24.*

## 2.4 Literature review

This section will, in addition to covering a brief general literature discussion, highlight two prominent pieces of research which will constitute a notable contribution to the composition of the overall research structure. To answer the research question, a combination of deductive and abductive reasoning will be utilized. Deductive reasoning in the process of deriving frames from the empirical data corpus, and abductive reasoning in the process of making theoretical claims

<sup>1</sup> As of the 1st of June 2022, Belgium has fully decriminalized sex work (Stroobants 2022).

from the frames deducted. The subject matter's lack of consistent data, scarcity in public discourse on a European level, and periods of issue stagnation will pragmatically lead to the necessity of a mixed research approach.

There is a vast literature on the subject of sex work/ prostitution, covered in several different disciplines. The most commonly studied contexts are legislative approaches and their moral implications (Bettio et al. 2017, Joulaei et al 2021, Scoular and FitzGerald 2021). Second to that, the most common topics relate to the lives, conditions, and social identity of the sex worker (Ryan & McGarry 2020, Toubiana & Ruebottom 2022), national case studies (Sullivan 2010, Munro & Scoular 2012, Huglstad et al. 2020), and trafficking (George et al. 2010, Lee & Persson 2022). There are also notable temporal trends in the field with topics such as Metoo (Farley 2018) and, more recently, COVID-19 (Singer et al. 2020, Azam et al. 2021). Since this thesis time delimitation coincides with both the Metoo movement and the COVID-19 pandemic, a look into the impact of the two highlighted interesting academic evolutions on the topic of sex work/ prostitution is needed. During the Metoo movement, much of the literature focused on dimensions such as violence against women (Farley 2018) and the furthering of consent as a legal concept (Bacik 2021). Although often different in approach and incidence, most Metoo-centered studies have a clear angle on the question of demand and criminal burden, leaning the overall debate towards the promotion of the Nordic Model, a.k.a neo-abolitionism. In contrast, much of the research conducted on sex work and COVID-19 focused, for example, on the hardships of ensuring safe work spaces and the effects of loss of income (Shankar et al. 2022). Or, focusing instead more on the human rights aspect, disease prevention, and occupational organization and recognition, arguing for more financial support from the state and describing the otherwise disproportionate negative financial effect for sex workers (Benoit & Unsworth 2022). Subsequently, there is no discernible evidence of an existing research hegemony on the topic at large.

Notably, however, there is a lack of theorizing about the topic on a purely policy-driven level, especially on an international level. In one article evaluating the literature on prostitution and sex work, Ronald Weitzer (2005), describes the topic as being in a theoretical deficit, oftentimes allowing for theoretical pitfalls due to the sparse variety of approaches examined in the field.

Discussions on prostitution policy within the realm of the EU most prominently focus on human trafficking (Askola 2007, Di Nicola et al. 2009) or MS case studies (Hubbard et al. 2008, Økland Jahnsen & Wagenaar 2018) only grazing the subject of the emergence of prostitution on the EU agenda. In fact, where literature on prostitution as a social and moral dilemma or legal phenomenon is plentiful, research on prostitution as it relates to policy, especially on an EU level, has not generated as much attention (Økland Jahnsen & Wagenaar 2018: 32). Existing literature has often overlooked the causal factors of *why* the EU, and more specifically the EP, has positioned itself in such a controversial and seemingly out-of-competence area. The aim of

this thesis is to address the contemporary gap of the EP positioning, hopefully creating a deeper understanding of prostitution as a policy area in the EU.

Research on the rise of neo-abolitionist positioning and the export of the so-called *Nordic model* or *Swedish model* is a prevalent topic in the study of prostitution policy. A great bulk of previous research has set out to map the influence of Sweden on a country's policy formation on a case-by-case basis – most recently being France in 2016 and Ireland in 2017 adopting the neo-abolitionist legislative approach (McMenzie et al. 2019, Rubio Grundell, 2021b). But any linkage done with the EU is often done parenthetically as part of a broader analysis.

A considerable obstacle and existing gap in the literature is the lack of coherent data and policy classification (Cauduro 2009, Weitzer 2015, Östergren 2017), both within prostitution and human trafficking – which is widely recognized as impeding the discussion and intersubjective conclusions on cost minimization and benefit maximization in different legislative approaches. In some works, there is a clear division of utilized data depending on if the author argues – in broad terms – for or against the legalization of prostitution. As is the case with the published FEMM committee study (European Parliament 2021a) and the subsequent letter and statement of concern published by the European Sex Workers Alliance (2021a, 2021b) in response to the study, critiquing the data. References made to any data set will hence be transparent in the eventual contestation of available and published data.

#### 2.4.1 Notable previous contributions

In her article *Agenda setting, agenda blocking and policy silence: Why is there no EU policy on prostitution?* Gill Allwood (2018) explores the success and failure of issues gaining traction on the EU policy agenda, by examining the case of prostitution. Allwood hypothesizes that prostitution is absent from the EU agenda, not as an issue of lack of competence, but rather that competence is utilized as an active tool for agenda silencing. Therefore rendering policy silencing an active act and agenda strategy (2018: 126).

Allwood explains the two main reasons for prostitution not achieving agenda status as being 1. The controversial nature of the topic, and 2. That the issue is outside the realm of EU competence. She concludes that the visual level of polarization around the controversy can be derived from the developments in two notable member states, Sweden and the Netherlands, in 1999 when both changed their legislation on prostitution (2018: 127). Furthermore, Allwood links the discussion on the controversy with the issue of competence, challenging the notion of lack of competence as in fact being an issue of framing. Although none of the current Treaties has defined a specific competence of prostitution in the relationship between institutions or between member states and the EU, Allwood firmly argues that the notion of EU competence is malleable. Boldly, Allwood (2018: 127) states that;



Less divisive issues have been separated from the issue of prostitution itself and legislated upon quickly and decisively. Such is the case for trafficking in human beings, and child prostitution and pornography. [...] Is it possible to continue arguing that prostitution is inherently outside the EU's competence, when there are so many ways that it could be linked to EU concerns?

In conclusion, Allwood's findings are summarized in two parts, agenda setting and silencing as well as the future of prostitution on the EU agenda (2018: 132). The importance of framing in both silencing and attempts of breaking the silence is described as institutionalized, active, and still the seemingly most successful approach to influencing the agenda – both internally and externally. The argument of lack of competence remains the principal excluder for prostitution to enter the agenda, whether framed within the realms of gender equality, economic activity, violence against women, or social inequality.

The second piece of previous research that is highlighted in this review is the academic work of Lucrecia Rubio Grundell (2020, 2021a, 2021b). Rubio Grundell has in the last two years published three articles on the subject of prostitution in Europe: (1) explaining the rise of neo-abolitionism in the EP, (2) linking the rise of neo-abolitionism to neoliberalism, and (3) examining the emergence of European morality politics through the case of prostitution. Although all three articles will be utilized by the author of this text, only one will be explored in further detail as it most closely relates to the subject matter and empirical focus of this thesis.

Rubio Grundell (2021a) in the article *The EU's approach to prostitution: Explaining the 'why' and 'how' of the EP's neo-abolitionist turn* aim to examine and explain the rise of the neo-abolitionist turn in the EP from the 1980s to 2014. Through the lens of gender equality, she creates a comprehensive analysis of the occurrence of prostitution on the agenda of the EU. Using a chronological analysis of policy documents from the last three decades, Rubio Grundell (2021a: 432) highlights the advancement of prostitution from ambivalence to conflict and debate, to the fortification of an explicit neo-abolitionist approach.

The article finds three explanatory factors for this development: (1) Sweden's accession to the EU and subsequent gender policy positioning, (2) the institutional link between the EC, EP, and the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in a so-called velvet triangle, (3) the increasing association between neo-abolitionist ideals and gender equality. The first explanatory factor is described as being a large part of Sweden's international identity formation, with distinguished characteristics in the context of the Sweden–EU relationship (2021a: 436). Secondly, through utilizing the velvet triangle theory, Rubio Grundell notes the importance and significance of the advocacy networks, most prevalently EWL, in promoting the neo-abolitionist perspective which has created a steadfast grip over the agenda - utilizing a clear “with us or against us” rhetoric. Finally, through what is described as a new hybrid model of equality there has been successful framing resulting in a presence on the agenda, albeit limited. Rubio Grundell (2021a: 437) describes the neo-abolitionist framing as eliminating alternative understandings of prostitution

whilst simultaneously inciting the EU to engage in the issue regardless of the disputable competence. This is theorized to be the result of framing the issue as a fundamental value of the EU within the realm of gender equality.

These aforementioned examples of previous research create a foundation for this research to build upon and continue to explore the research gap with a contemporary analysis of the current state of play, whilst taking inspiration from the use of framing and theory linking prominent in both Allwood's and Rubio Grundell's work.

### 3. Methodology: Contextualizing the language of the European Parliament

This section presents the chosen methodology with motivations for the application of frame analysis. Starting with the chosen research design, moving into the methodological discussion, and ending with a discussion and reflection of the empirical data – this section will present the methodological tools chosen to most adequately answer the research question.

#### 3.1 Research design

This study conducts research focused on the actors and structures that have influenced the position of the EP in the case of prostitution, the empirical material is examined using frame analysis. The chosen methodological approach is motivated by the aim of explaining the establishment and exploring the construction of the EP's chosen viewpoint. Frame analysis is the best way to address prostitution in the EP as it can explain the developments of the different viewpoints regardless of the fact that there is no present EU policy. The posed question is why the neo-abolitionist approach, criminalizing the buyer and legalizing the seller, is seen as the solution to such a highly debated topic. It is interesting to study prostitution in the EP as it is representative of a case of non-competence and how the EU navigates issues that they in some capacity might want to manage for reasons of harmonization.

This single policy case study allows for a comprehensive analysis of prostitution policy in the EU, between the period of 2014–2021, and the changes and impacts over said period of time. Considering that prostitution within the context of the EU has clear delimitations in available material, it enables strong possibilities for case studies, but limited expected success with other research designs. Since the center of the research is focused on the interplay between lack of competence and attempts at fitting an issue within the realm of it – a comparative or experimental design would not simply be able to capture this struggle (Kronsell & Manners 2015: 86).

The aim of this thesis is achieved by examining the 2014 Honeyball resolution as a starting point, moving into the current state of play to investigate the success and failure of prominent frames in resolutions from the EP, as well as statements from advocacy groups, ending at the 2021 FEMM Report. This contemporary time span is inspired by the previous works of Rubio Grundell (2021a) and the analytical start of where her previous work left off (2014) aided in creating a clear delimitation in time. The importance of delimiting space and time when conducting a single policy study may otherwise be challenging as there seldom is a clear beginning and end to a policy (Kronsell & Manners 2015: 88) The frames in the resolutions are to be sectioned into larger categories in order to structure the analysis and to be able to draw

stronger conclusions on thematic frame changes. This design allows for a qualitative observation of all ways prostitution is framed both to and from the EP.

With the intent to understand how and why the EP has reached an internal understanding of prostitution as an issue comparable to slavery and the apex of gender inequality (European Parliament 2021a: 9), the methodological procedure in the analysis is designed in a two-stage process: (1) starting with a frame analysis to assign meaning to events and conditions attempting to spur collective action (Crespy 2015: 106), and (2) through the utilization of the theoretical framework explore the actor connections, prevalent structures, and the agenda presence or absence. The reason for choosing this combination of methodological and theoretical frameworks is that, based on previous research and consideration of available material, it will yield the most fruitful results in capturing the construction of the process over time.

In the first step of the analysis, the data corpus consisting of the EP documents was compiled and analyzed through keyword searches with the aim of capturing where and how prostitution/ sex work was framed. These frames were then deductively categorized into six main distinguishable categories which serve as the main headings for the analysis. The categories were thoroughly chosen to try and encompass the phenomenon of what the frames represent (Rein & Schön 1996: 99). From this base, the second part of the analysis could be employed with more in-depth frame analysis. From the start, the assumption of frame analysis is to assume the existence of multiple interpretations of policy (Verloo 2005: 18), this makes the understanding of knowledge and the world constructivist (Furlong & Marsh 2010: 190). With that follows the risk of subjective bias as the researcher and the research is interlinked, and as such the analytical choices regarding categorization will be thoroughly motivated in order to enhance the level of intersubjectivity.

A created theoretical framework consisting of agenda setting theory, Europeanization, and the two more actor-focused norm entrepreneurs and the velvet triangle guides the analysis to include both a structure and actor focus with the intent to capture as much of the construction, contestation, and policy expression as possible (Daviter 2011: 27). A feminist theoretical framework was considered but ultimately not chosen as the researcher wished not to advocate for any type of legislative side, but rather try and contribute to the development of research in the field by not applying theoretical approaches that would lock in on one perspective (Weitzer 2005: 230).

### 3.2 Frame analysis

Frame analysis is a multi-disciplined manner in which to systematically analyze discourse, through the categorizations of texts into so-called frames. The function of a frame is to assign meaning to events and/or conditions in such a way that it mobilizes support to an often broader issue and attempts to demobilize other contesting frames or actors (Crespy 2018: 107). Compared to other discursive approaches, frame analysis addresses both the construction of

meaning and the roles of the actors in the process (Björnehed & Erikson 2018: 109). This thesis will utilize frame analysis to discern the discursive structural elements in the empirical material to create a Meso-level analysis of the emergence of a social structure, in this case, a public policy position. Where possible, actors and arenas will be analyzed to gain a fuller sense of how the world is reflected, reproduced, or resisted in the issue presented.

In order to develop an operationalization of how this analysis will make use of framing, a foundation of the view on discourse will be explored. Discourse will be applied to the research to examine how it, and the frames presented in the analyzed material, affect the recognition and alters the shape of the prostitution policy debate. In other words, how discourse constructs frameworks for policy and how policy may suggest evidence of discourse. Furthermore, discourse is viewed as a tool expected to be used strategically by actors in order to encapsulate a subject outside of recognized EU competence into the realm of EU-level politics. Strategies of discourse and framing may also entail attempts at keeping an issue off the agenda, in attempts at what Gill Allwood (2018) calls agenda silencing. Consequently, discourse is viewed through the epistemological lens of constructivism; it is a socially constructed process influencing structures and actors' conceptions of an issue's relevancy, urgency, connectedness, and solutional power. Certain issues might develop discursive hegemonies, but there is no existence of a singular discourse. In order for an issue to be salient, regardless of whether it is accepted or denounced by society, there needs to be constant construction and reconstruction of the issue for its existence to be affirmed and reaffirmed.

The scope and versatility of frame analysis are incredibly broad. For example, it is applicable in fields such as communication (Entman 1993), sociology (Goffman 1986), and gender studies (Verloo 2005). As a result, frame analysis has faced criticism due to a lack of conceptual clarity. In order to formulate a clear methodological framework, with the ambition of achieving a higher level of reliability, this thesis will apply the theoretical thoughts of Rein and Schön (1996), and the analytical developments from Emma Björnehed and Josefina Erikson (2018).

A frame, within the context of the policy process, is deemed a “policy frame”, which Mieke Verloo (2005: 20) defines as an organizing principle of information, creating a cohesive understanding of a problem, oftentimes explicitly or implicitly presented with a possible solution. Myra Ferree (2009: 89) describes political framings in official texts as opportunity structures that create connections between people, concepts, and events. Frames are thus never isolated concepts but relational. These structures shape political actors by making some of the connections seem definite, and others more ambiguous. Depending on the actor, this may lead to constraints in the political sphere as it sets them opposed to the status quo. Such is the power of frames, and “not just something that exists passively as text ‘on paper’” (ibid). Issues are understood and framed by decision-makers, contextualizing – in this case, prostitution – with

relevant meaning and in turn, may use the frame to influence the issue's agenda relevancy or insignificance.

Epistemically, a frame is situated in the social reality, contextually bound to a thematic attempt at, in its broadest sense, persuasion. In order to methodically detect a frame, some linguistic reductionism is required to boil a message down to simple categorization of frames (Wagenaar 2011: 89). What this means is that in the empirical material analyzed, frames will be linked to keywords associated with the presentation of prostitution in the text, i.e. in what way is prostitution talked about in the material? Which prominent themes are linked to prostitution?

When analyzing the construction of frames, there may arise some ambiguity of meaning. In order to try and circumvent this, two distinctions of frames will be utilized: rhetorical and action frames (Rein & Schön 1996: 90). The difference between them is not in fact based on the use of metaphors or the call to action, but rather on what evidence the frame is constructed. A rhetorical frame is built upon policy-relevant texts, which forms a leap from how something is to how something ought to be. An action frame is constructed from observations of action patterns: previous accounts in the debate create a base that now translates into a new frame that creates coherence in the line of argument (1996: 91). For the application of this to the subject of prostitution in the EP these types of frames will be used to aid in the understanding of frame construction.

Björnehed and Erikson conceptualized two dimensions of frame analysis specifically for application in the field of policy analysis: (1) the frame institutionalization process, and (2) the expansion of frame effects, as successors to *the framing process* and *frame effects*. These two concepts directly relate to the conduct of frame analysis. The first step is to localize a frame and analyze the constructed meaning within, and step two is to identify the effects the frame has on behavior, structure, or outcome. 'Frame institutionalization process' measures a frame's success in terms of its level of institutionalization, while the 'expansion of frame effects' measures the actors influenced by the frame, rather than the effectiveness of the frame itself. Frame institutionalization is described as frames moving in between levels of recognition, which ties in with the notion of agenda setting, which will be defined in the following chapter. Björnehed and Erikson (2018: 111) claim that the application of the two analytical dimensions allows for an analysis that captures more than the discursive meaning of the frame, but rather the process of the frame over time – which opens for a broader interpretation of the process of meaning construction.

These conceptualizations will be the main tools used to analyze the frames found in the empirical material. The expected result of combining Rein and Schön with Björnehed and Erikson is to get a fuller sense of the present frames and their developments. Hopefully, it also brings more body

to the analysis of the available empirical material, as prostitution is not extensively discussed in the EP.

### 3.3 Empirical material and material delimitations

The scope of the analysis is shaped by two main publications: the Honeyball resolution in 2014 as our starting point, and the 2021 study *The differing EU Member States' regulations on prostitution and their cross-border implications on women's rights* as the end of the chosen period of analysis. These two larger documents will serve as reference points, with a focus on the 2021 report, for the developments of framing of the topic. The bulk of the material will consist of EP resolutions and reports published in the chosen time frame. Additionally, when possible, additions will be made with statements from lobby groups, written MEP questions, and other relevant actor-focused material, to substantiate claims and get more reference points to the analysis.

Making a keyword search (September 2022) on EUR-Lex, the search term “prostitution” produced 135 documents, between the years 2014–2021. The terms “sex work” and “sex workers” on the other hand only yielded 12 results in total. The data corpus from EUR-lex chosen consists of 25 documents, most of which are own-initiative resolutions from the EP. These documents were chosen as the most relevant examples where prostitution was mentioned in a framing context by the EP. Among the documents excluded were opinions by other EU institutions, judicial opinions or requests, documents pertaining to a specific geographical area, or documents where prostitution where only mentioned in footnotes or played an equally non-existent role. Similarly, documents where prostitution singularly was mentioned in reference to direct illegal activities, such as child abuse or forced prostitution through trafficking, were also excluded from the data. Some decisions regarding empirical material also had to be considered due to the limited scope of the research. However, glancing through other available sources, the author has declared there to be empirical maturity and that additional data would only lead to saturation of the same themes.

Out of the 25 documents chosen, the average number of mentions of “prostitution” is circa six times per document, and even lower for the term “sex work” which on average only occurs 0.28 times per document. A notable outlier for the usage of terminology is the Honeyball resolution which mentions prostitution 77 times, the average occurrence of the word “prostitution” drops to about 3.5 times per document when discounting the Honeyball resolution. The 2021 report is another outlier not considered in this average as it alone mentions “prostitution” 417 times, and “sex work” 77 times.

This study will not to any greater extent examine documents from any other EU institutions than the European Parliament. The reason for this is simply that the scope of this research focuses purely on the EP's stance, as that is where the most prominent political documents relating to the

subject have been produced. An example highlighting this fact is the 2022 report on gender equality in the EU, published by the European Commission. The report, while covering subjects such as human trafficking and gender gaps in the labor market, mentions neither prostitution nor sex work – a keyword search simply gives a null result. Mentions of prostitution in official EU documents are few and far between, and oftentimes only mention the issue in passing which cause the scope of the empirical material to be slim.

When analyzing discourse in official European Union documents there are by default some limitations present. Firstly, although there is a large body of documents present - many lack real discussion and motivation as to why prostitution is presented if at all. Oftentimes, prostitution is mentioned almost in passing, not given any pertinent focus in the text. This gives rise to the problem of *where* the discourse is. Many of the informal interactions, social contacts, and other factors which may play into the long-term development of the framing of prostitution may be unavailable for the researcher to access. Secondly, as discussed in previous sections, the aspect of prostitution in the EU is largely affected by active agenda silencing – a phenomenon not easily observable: how do you approach what is not visible or tangible? With the need for limitation of material, this phenomenon will only be researched insofar as posing the question of what happens to raised issues after they were brought to the agenda. Traces of dismissal, bypasses, or the issue simply being ignored will be explored as silencings. Within the delimitations of this thesis, a further delve into the prominent actors through first-hand collected data such as interviews might have been desirable, but not plausible within the timeframe of this study.



## 4. Theoretical framework: Understanding the process and actors in hegemonic frame construction

Building upon the theories and concepts defined in this section, the intent of this research is to explore the catalysts of an EU institution's attempt at negotiating European norms and identity through extended interest, in a policy field outside of a tangible competence.

This study will not root the analysis in feminist theory or framework in order to circumvent the discussion on which legislative approach offers the most fruitful solution for women's rights, minimizing trafficking, and social equality. Instead, this thesis's theoretical aim is to try and discern *why* the EP has positioned itself in the question of prostitution and what that entails for the ambition of policy, in an area without formal EU decision-making competence. However, due to the inherent feminist nature of the topic, the thesis will make use of feminist authors and concepts in order to capture actors, structures, and possible frames prevalent in the development of the EP's statement.

The theoretical framework established below focuses on both structure and actors in an attempt at distinguishing the explanatory factors of why the EP has positioned itself in the 2021 report. Through the use of policy and norm entrepreneurs and the velvet triangle, the aim is to map out prevalent actors and their constellations, examining their success in influencing the agenda. Explaining and analyzing the EP's positioning will be accomplished by tying in Europeanization, combined with agenda setting to explain the issue being high or low the agenda – both theories trying to understand who, from which direction of influence, and under what conditions the agenda, may be influenced.

### 4.1 Agenda setting

The term *agenda* will be defined in line with John Kingdon's (2014: 3) definition as a topic or list of topics that political actors and people in close relation to political actors pay close attention to at any given time. The importance of agendas is the simple fact that policy can only become just that if it receives sufficient attention from policy-makers. Additionally, something "being on the agenda" will be limited to the inclusion of at least one of the EU institutions, either as a central topical part of the discussion or as a venue for the discussion.

Prostitution has only twice, between 2014–2021, been the main focus of a resolution published by the EP, and those two texts have subsequently become the two framing pillars for this study's chosen time frame. When prostitution is mentioned, it is most often mentioned as a variable in a policy text pertaining to another subject, such as gender equality, poverty, health care, or human rights. Therefore, the author makes the argument that prostitution as such has not yet reached higher than the agenda setting stage in the policy-making process. Rephrased, prostitution has

not yet entered the EU ‘decision agenda’, but rather remains on the ‘governmental agenda’ and therefore the policy-making activity remains at the domestic level (Princen 2012: 44). What then is it that yet makes prostitution salient, to be continuously brought up on an EU level? What prompts the EP to overtly state a preference in the legal aspects of a question that is not otherwise prevalent in the policy process? Agenda setting will aid in not only contextualizing the issue to where the discussions take place within the EU institutional structure but also contextualizing what other issues may have been on the agenda at the same time. The author hypothesizes that specific frames will be prominent in certain years based on other world events that expectedly shape the agenda, e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic will plausibly correlate to more frames connected to health care.

Accordingly, the focus of this study is the agenda setting stage of the policy process. Agenda setting serves as the venue where framing plays a vital part in establishing what policymakers give priority or deem important at a certain point in time (Princen 2015: 124). As opposed to focusing on another part of the policy-making process, the agenda highlights the struggle of meaning and definition for an issue to be accepted onto it, in turn how the political reality is constructed. In short, it is not concerned with decisions made but rather issues that decision-makers pay attention to (2009: 1). Analyzing the framing of prostitution as an attempt at shifting into EU competence, the agenda naturally becomes the most desirable focus point as it enables the examination of the potential power struggle of keeping prostitution present on the agenda (2015: 125).

This thesis will conduct a two-step analysis of the empirical material in order to discern how the topic of prostitution has navigated the agenda. In order to mitigate the risk of overstating the presence of the issue on or off the agenda, this study will utilize the terminology of whether the issue is “high” or “low” on the agenda. This will turn our focus to the interesting question: how is the subject presented on the agenda?

Attempts at bringing something onto the EU agenda can be summarized into two factors: (1) objectives of change, and (2) instruments available (Princen 2012: 32). If there is a match between what is being argued and what the EU is capable of doing, then an issue can be expected to successfully enter the agenda. The key lies in receptiveness, and receptiveness may be formed by framing. As formulated by Baumgartner and Jones (2009: 25 & 31), it is dependent on policy-making venues, and policy image, i.e. framing.

How a policy actor chooses to situate an issue may affect its existence within the EU realm. Strategically linking an issue to fit inside the EU remit may move it onto the agenda, even though the issue might not formally fall under EU competence (Princen 2012: 32). Hence, matters such as issue spill-over, may be explained by developments of new frame attempts. However, the possible success of a frame gaining a “high” agenda status is still dependent on a

myriad of factors, such as outside events affecting salience, or the availability of a receptive venue.

This study's focus on the European Parliament would describe the institution as possessing both institutional and ideational characteristics, i.e. in some sense playing the role of both venue and actor. The EP aims to influence the EU to take further action in developing prostitution legislation, while at the same time being influenced to develop a position on the topic.

The EP's level of agenda setting power is relatively high, especially after the introduction of the co-decision procedure (Kreppel & Webb 2019: 383). With its own initiative resolutions, the EP has tangible effects of influence over policy outcomes. According to one study, the EP is most effective as an agenda setter when resolutions attempt to push the EU to integrate new policy areas, rather than pushing for change in existing policy areas (2019: 398). The reasoning behind this is partly explained by the fact that there, in new policy areas, is no status quo. Furthermore, Sebastiaan Princen (2009: 37) has found that the introduction to an issue on the agenda might not lead to the expected conflict expansion, but rather might lead to contraction. This is explained by the EU structure not having as strong of a link to public opinion and mobilization as nation-states. The effects of conflict expansion and contraction emphasize the importance of using the terms "high" and "low" rather than "on" and "off" the agenda.

## 4.2 Europeanization

In order to clearly understand prostitution's presence or lack thereof on the EU agenda, the concept of Europeanization will be applied. Overlapping Europeanization with agenda setting theory creates a theoretical Venn diagram of common interest in how and why the EU brings forth new issues and policy areas to the table (Princen 2012: 30). While agenda setting explores the potential expansion or contraction of an issue in the EU sphere, Europeanization explores the process of mutual influence between the EU and its member states.

Providing a perspective on how governance is changing, Europeanization is a term that has garnered a variety of definitions. It aids in understanding the *sui generis* aspects of the EU, while also being able to account for why certain member states are successfully resilient to certain types of policy (Dosenrode 2020: 25). This myriad of explanatory possibilities does not come without the need for a clear definition. Since the first conceptualizations of Europeanization, several different scholars have defined and redefined the concept to explain European integration in different fashions (Knill & Lehmkuhl 1999, Olsen 2002, Graziano 2003). For this study, Claudio Radaelli's (2004: 3) definition will be utilized:

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then

incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.

Europeanization will thus be viewed as a concept both resulting in downloading, and diffusing policy and norms down to the member states' national and regional level, and up-loading, with member states influencing the EU to reorient the shape and direction of politics and norms on an international level. Furthermore, perceiving Europeanization as a process rather than measuring it in terms of impact enables the researcher to encapsulate discourses and socialization processes into consideration instead of limiting the concept to the more narrow notion of impact and the focus on Brussels.

Europeanization is recognized as *something to be explained* rather than *something that explains* i.e. be viewed as the problem and not the solution (Radaelli 2004: 2). Rephrased, Europeanization in and of itself is not a goal, but rather a process where we will examine the change or lack thereof in construction, diffusion, or institutionalization (Exadaktylos et al. 2020: 51). While examining both approval and rejection, how and why prostitution has danced around the agenda can be more thoroughly understood. Rejections of topics considered on the agenda, especially such a norm-forward topic as prostitution, may indicate how an individual member state imagines itself *vis-à-vis* the EU and Europe as a whole, i.e. the level to which national sovereignty precedes EU harmonization (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 26).

Combining Europeanization with agenda-setting theory, looking at prostitution and how it is framed in the empirical material, the possibility of a streamlined debate on prostitution will be explored. Has the EU policies on trafficking in human beings and furthering gender equality created enough EU autonomy on the issue to influence the framing of prostitution? What aspects of prostitution reach the attention of decision-makers, how are these frames centered, and what frames might be rejected? Through both employing agenda setting theory and Europeanization, this text will thus enable further analysis of not just the frames present on the agenda but also the development (or lack thereof) of regulatory Europeanization within the issue.

### 4.3 Policy and Norm Entrepreneurs

A policy entrepreneur is a problem-solving actor, strongly committed to a certain idea or policy, attempting to act as an informal agenda setter (Kingdon 2014: 122). A policy entrepreneur's commitment may, but not exclusively, be measured in resources such as time, money, reputation, or connections. When promoting policy change, these entrepreneurs deploy several different strategies, these include; framing and re-framing an issue to promote new solutions, creating coalitions in order to strengthen the advocacy power possibilities, and re-scaling the advocacy to broaden the scope of policy change (Mintrom 2019: 1). As such, there is a level of externality in the definition of a policy entrepreneur and a desire to disrupt the status quo through innovation (2019: 10).

Utilizing the theory of policy entrepreneurs in the area of prostitution inevitably stems from a question of norms and attempts at norm diffusion due to the issues moral aspects. This study will thus analyze concerned actors through not only the lens of policy entrepreneurship but further through the lens of normative entrepreneurship in the endeavor to discern the internalization of norms and the subsequent framing.

The concept of norm entrepreneurs, as will be applied in this study, is derived from constructivist ideas of knowledge transfer. Rather than focusing solely on the diffusion and assumption of one normative approach to be morally desirable, this text will apply a critical constructivist approach highlighting the distinguishable contestations and dual qualities constructed in the social interaction constructing and negotiating the existence of said norms on the agenda (Wunderlich 2020: 2).

The terminology of norm entrepreneurs will be operationally defined as actors, both state and non-state, who through purposeful and resolute action strive to promote the establishment, diffusion, and institutionalization of norms (Björkdahl 2002: 46). Through this definition, this text aims to not give primacy to either an actor centristic or structure centristic ontological view.

In order to understand how, where, and why a policy entrepreneur might be successful in securing policy change – they need to be contextualized in theories of the policy-making process. In his book, John Kingdon (2014: 19) advances a framework that has been titled the multiple streams framework, to understand agenda setting and policy advancement. Kingdon conceptualizes three process streams; problems, policies, and politics. These so-called streams act and develop largely independently from the others, but may be joined together at critical junctures culminating in policy change. The focus of this multiple streams approach is to ascertain how policy problems and solutions gain traction at specific times. As described by Annica Kronsell and Ian Manners (2015: 90); the decision process is formed by complexity and ambiguity with the many ways in which an issue can be framed, defined, and possibly “solved”. In the EU plurality is dominant, in terms of actors, venues, and hierarchies. As such, problems may develop simultaneously on different levels, by different actors. When and if the streams are crossed a decision may arise, and the agenda is solidified. Integrating policy entrepreneurs with theorizations on policy change and agenda setting allows for a line of investigation into where the policy entrepreneurs fit in the process and how they have impacted and influenced change (Mintrom 2019: 32). This will be applied where actor tracing is possible.

#### 4.4 The Velvet triangle

The velvet triangle was originally thought of as a concept to illustrate the importance of informal connections in transnational European gender equality policy-making (Woodward 2015: 9). The idea was to identify a network of actors within and outside the state, that through social ties

overcame the lack of a fundamental power base, from a feminist perspective, in the EU in the policy process. When the term velvet triangle was coined, it was described as consisting of EU-level bureaucrats, feminist academics, and women's movement activists (Woodward 2003: 77).

The successful mobilization of women's politics in the EU has historically been attributed to the formation of velvet triangles, which included policy areas such as violence against women and prostitution, especially around the mid-1990s (Rubio Grundell 2021a: 433). Since then, the concept, largely based on heuristics, has been challenged by several scholars for being too rigid and limited (Holli 2008). Alison Woodward (2015) has analyzed the velvet triangle's current applicability and found that a transformation of the concept may be needed to suit the current gender politics arena, in large part due to the successful gender mainstreaming in the last decade.

This study aims to apply the concept of the velvet triangle in order to understand the influence of actors and identity-based networks in the case of the EU and prostitution. As stated in Rubio Grundell's article (2021a), velvet triangle constellations have shaped the debate previously. Therefore remnants of the structures can be expected to be found today – especially in an area such as prostitution which has not experienced any harmonization onto the EU agenda. The author of this text hypothesizes that examining older patterns of actor constellations will aid in tracing the explanatory factors of the current state of play.

## 5. Analysis: Towards a single notion of a complex issue?

The first step of the analysis started with a simple keyword search for the prevalence of the terms “prostitution” and “sex work” in the chosen material. Included in the keyword searches, but not present in the texts to the same extent, were similar terminology such as “prostitute”, “sex worker”, “sex services”, and “sex industry”. Excluded from the data collection were documents related solely to criminal activities related to children, forced prostitution through the trafficking of human beings, or similar topics. In such documents where there is no area for discussion or thought of consent, the mention of prostitution is void.

The first steps were to categorize the material based on the frequency of present terminology, as the author hypothesizes that a higher frequency of mentions of “prostitution” and/or “sex work” will include more or stronger frames. Secondly, an overarching analysis of the frames present in the corpus was conducted to thematically categorize them into larger frames, which will serve as the subheadings for this chapter (see Table 3).

Overall, prostitution is rarely mentioned in EU policy documents, but when the subject occurs, in the documents selected for this thesis, it is related to one or several of the following contexts presented in the table below. The number of bodies of texts analyzed amounts to 25 unique documents, with a total of 53 mentionings of any of the abovementioned keywords across the entire empirical collection. In addition to these EP resolutions and reports, the analysis will draw upon texts from other actors where possible, e.g. written questions to the Commission, open letters, and other responses/ opinions from lobby groups. The initial analysis generates the following results in terms of prevalent frames and the quantity in which they are mentioned.

<b>Frames</b>	<b>No. of mentions (total n=53)</b>
Violence against children (VAC)	6
Violence against women (VAW)	6
Trafficking in human beings (THB)	5
Women in poverty	4
Human rights	3
Criminalising the purchase of sex decreases spaces where THB is prevalent	2
Gender inequality	2
Importance of exit programs	2
MS need to design socioeconomic policies to help people in prostitution	2
Prostitution industry feeds on vulnerability of migrant women	2
Targeting demand reduction	2
Undocumented people are more easily abused	2
Victim's accessibility to both physical and psychological aid	2
Children's rights	1
COVID-19 affecting sex workers possibility of income	1
Discrimination faced by sex workers in access to funding, housing, and health care	1
Drug usage and treatment	1
Equating prostitution with forced labor	1
Extremist internet grooming into prostitution	1
Gender stereotypes increase risk of violence	1
MS should provide centers and shelters for women in need	1
Prostitution as a health issue for both the sex worker and the buyer	1
Prostitution is a form of slavery	1
Prostitution is a serious form of violence	1
Sex workers right to job security	1
Trafficking of children	1

Table 2: Frames prominent in the empirical data. *Source: Author 2022.*

Many of these frames share an underlying thematic base, which can be summarized into larger categories. Although some frames have properties that may fit into several different types of categories, the author has through the thorough reading of the data chosen the six groupings



presented in Table 3. These categories serve the purpose of creating a simplified overview of the themes of frames which will aid in the structure of this chapter as well as enable the possibility to discern the most impactful motifs of frames. The subheadings will be presented in no particular order. The observed frames from the data are categorized as follows:

<b>1. Children’s rights</b>	<b>2. Gender equality</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Children’s rights</li> <li>❖ Trafficking in children</li> <li>❖ Violence against children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Gender inequality</li> <li>❖ Gender stereotypes</li> <li>❖ Violence against women</li> <li>❖ Women in poverty</li> </ul>
<b>3. Health care</b>	<b>4. Human rights</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ COVID-19 affecting sex workers' possibility of income</li> <li>❖ Drug usage and treatment</li> <li>❖ Prostitution as a health issue</li> <li>❖ Victim’s accessibility to both physical and psychological aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Equating prostitution with forced labor</li> <li>❖ Human rights</li> <li>❖ Prostitution is a form of slavery</li> <li>❖ Prostitution is a serious form of violence</li> <li>❖ Undocumented people are more easily abused</li> </ul>
<b>5. National and international security</b>	<b>6. Appeals to action</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Extremist internet grooming into prostitution</li> <li>❖ Trafficking in human beings (THB)</li> <li>❖ Vulnerability of migrant women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Centers and shelters for women in need</li> <li>❖ Criminalising the purchase of sex decreases spaces where THB is prevalent</li> <li>❖ Discrimination faced by sex workers</li> <li>❖ Importance of exit programs</li> <li>❖ MS socioeconomic policies</li> <li>❖ Sex workers right to job security</li> <li>❖ Targeting demand reduction</li> </ul>

Table 3: Division of observed frames from Table 2 into categories.

## 5.1 Children’s rights

One of the six common thematic framings observed is the connection between prostitution and children’s rights. This connection inherently stems from a perspective of the costs of prostitution, i.e. trafficking and sexual exploitation. The type of frames that connect prostitution to child rights issues are politically and judicially non-contentious. That is what sets this theme apart from the other categories that will be discussed below; it shifts the focus in a way that excludes prostitution from the discussion (Allwood 2018: 130). Therefore, what is interesting about this frame approach is the complete change in subject from one to the other, a deflection.

Most prominently, in the documents where the children's rights frame is raised, it is often in relation to urging EU member states to ensure effective implementation of Article 3 of ILO Convention No 182 and UN Convention on the Rights of Child and its Optional Protocols, in order to ensure the safety and well-being of children in Europe, and worldwide

((2015/2572(RSP)), (2015/2229(INI))). These legal frameworks are quite far from a discussion on prostitution, though a link can be made as an argument on the risks of abuse that may occur in any given legal approach to prostitution. Framing prostitution in relation to the importance to protect child rights drastically changes the focus to an issue that needs a different set of political measures than when regulating prostitution.

In the chosen material, it is equally prominent to frame prostitution in terms of violence against women as it is with violence against children (See Table 2). Oftentimes they are merged and addressed as one category: “women and children”, such as is exemplified in the quote below. Similarly, the 2021 FEMM report only references children when talking about trafficking, in terms of “women and children” (European Parliament 2021a: 9 & 36).

Stresses that there are a number of links between prostitution and trafficking, and acknowledges that prostitution [...] fuels the trafficking of vulnerable women and minors. (2020/2215(INI))

This type of melding enhances the overall sense of victimhood of the women in prostitution. Since a child cannot consent, they can never be in a situation connected to prostitution where they are not a victim. Then, in establishing women and children as one category, attempting to remove the label of “victim” from women is unachievable. This framing plays into the hands of neo-abolitionists as it removes the dimensions of agency and autonomy from the sex worker (Bettio et al. 2017: 17).

Similar patterns can be seen in the discussion in the public hearing for the 2021 FEMM Report, during the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality's meeting on December 6th, 2021. During the public hearing, the following comments arose regarding the importance and relevance of discussing the sexual exploitation of children. The first quote is from MEP Elżbieta Łukacijewska from the EPP, and the second is the response from Sabrina Sanchez, a representative from the European Sex Workers Rights Alliance.

I think there is another important group that we have not mentioned here, children. Children are forced and abused more and more often [...] (European Parliament 2021b: 14:53:25) [*Transcribed from EP English translation*]

What we are seeing here is a complete confusion between what a very serious crime such as sexual exploitation of minors, evidently that is not something which we would defend. We in fact work against it. We are trying to be the best possible allies in the fight against trafficking. (European Parliament 2021b: 15:05:05) [*Transcribed from EP English translation*]

This interaction effectively illustrates the reservation about linking a discussion on prostitution to the issue of child exploitation from a decriminalization perspective. The response, defending and clarifying the ESWA opinion on trafficking and sexual exploitation of minors, showcases the

diametrically opposed sides to the prostitution debate and the impact of framing. The utilization of one frame, in this case, child abuse, by one party may be interpreted as putting the other party on the opposite side of the opinion articulated. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this is less about the arguments at hand, but rather about the debate climate.

The evolution of the prostitution debate in the EU has moved towards establishing a normative position, most clearly through the publication of the Honeyball resolution. Studies suggest that the EP's opinion most often is congruent with the median MEP, or, in cases where the EP's decision-making power is weaker or more limited, with the rapporteur (Costello & Thomson 2010: 235). Prostitution constitutes such a case as although it is present on the agenda, it is most commonly met with agenda silencing and non-intervention (Foret & Rubio Grundell 2020: 1811). Consequently, historical developments of the prostitution debate in the EU have rendered pro-decriminalization actors in a weaker bargaining position than abolitionists. This is illustrated in the abovementioned example of the expected diametrically of opinions. The difference in the bargaining situation will be further discussed in the following sections.

There do not appear to be any contemporary reasons behind the emergence or continuation of frames relating to children's rights. Unarguably the topic has a strong status quo, and the only debatable issue can really be attributed to that of EU competence and the possibility of further and stronger legislation. Any attempts at demanding EU policy on prostitution, based on arguments related to reducing child sexual exploitation, can be and often are negated through the EU's lack of competence and with reference to existing legislation on trafficking (2011/36/EU) and child abuse (2011/93/EU) that is within the remit of EU competence, and already in place.

In terms of agenda setting, in these cases, prostitution seemingly acts more as a catalyst to talk about the risk of children being sexually exploited, which then changes the subject to only accommodate the dimensions of that issue. This may be viewed as an attempt at controlling and shifting the policy debate away from the issue at hand, in order for another to stay off the agenda (Allwood 2018: 130). Since all parties, abolitionists and pro-legalization activists, are unanimous that no child should ever suffer, it is difficult to point towards any clear indicative aspects that this area in and of itself would have affected the EP to formulate an opinion on prostitution. However, the utilization of how and when the topic is raised can be argued to have strengthened the status quo of prostitution always possessing an element of coercion and exploitation.

As will be explored in the following chapters, prostitution, as a topic in the EU, is practically equated with trafficking and violence against women (Rubio Grundell 2021a: 426), which further strengthens the dichotomy of forced versus voluntary prostitution. The same thematic connections are visible here, it underscores the vulnerability aspects of prostitution and the inescapable consequence of the trafficking of minors. This linkage is therefore in competition

between those that want to place prostitution on the EU agenda, and those that want to keep it on the national level (Outshoorn et al. 2015: 168).

## 5.2 Gender equality

Although not the category with the most individual types of frames, the gender equality motif is one of if not the most frequently referenced when talking about prostitution in the EU. Utilized by both sides of the debate, each viewpoint argues that their beliefs and legislative approach promote gender equality. The viewpoint of the pro-sex work movement is that empowering a woman's choice and bodily autonomy enhances gender equality, whereas abolitionists view prostitution as being in violation of women's rights and the move towards equality is instead to prohibit the continuation of violence and exploitation of women (Outshoorn et al. 2015: 169).

In the empirical material, the framing of prostitution as VAW is the most common gender equality frame present.

[...] prostitution may be viewed as a type of violence against women, owing to the effect this has on their physical and mental health, especially in cases of forced prostitution [...] (2013/2004(INL))

Considers prostitution to be a serious form of violence and exploitation affecting mostly women and children. (2019/2188(INI))

Even when discussing other related issues, the issue circles back to the topic of VAW.

[...] poverty, gender inequality and gender stereotypes increase the risk of violence and other forms of exploitation, including trafficking in women and prostitution, and hamper the full participation of women in all areas of life. (2013/2078(INI))

Only in one of the EP documents that focus on the gender equality aspect of prostitution is the term sex work mentioned (2019/2169(INI)). However, the mention of sex work is not in reference to an opposing perspective or counterargument to the VAW frame. This would otherwise be expected since the terminology of sex work is most often used by pro-decriminalization supporters. Therefore, this author instead finds that the best approach to examining the gender equality framing of prostitution in the EP, as it relates to both abolitionism and pro-legalization, is to examine the status quo. This is based on the presence of strong frame institutionalization that has been notable since prostitution first entered the EU agenda in the early 80s (Outshoorn 2018: 441).

The fact that gender equality frames in EP documents are formulated consistently for the entire examined time period points towards a fully realized frame acceptance, having been officially acknowledged steadily – emerging as one of the first frames that aided in getting prostitution

onto the EP agenda (Outshoorn 2018: 443). In a 2012 flash survey from Eurobarometer regarding gender inequalities in the EU “trafficking in women and prostitution” was deemed the third largest perceived inequality between women and men (European Parliament 2012: 12). What the survey may tell us is that the level of frame institutionalization, i.e an abolitionist status quo, was already high in the years leading up to the implementation of the Honeyball resolution (2014). From the perspective of the opposition, the strengthening of VAW and other adjacent framings related to prostitution has decreased the space for opposing frames. The struggle for sex work positive frames to reenter the agenda is hindered by the created “blockade” of the status quo. This is also enhanced by the fact that the political space for prostitution overall is limited since, as stated previously, it is outside of formal EU competence.

In a written question to the Commission in 2019 by MEP Sandra Pereira (GUE/NGL), the VAW perspective is underlined and tries to engage the Commission in explicitly stating an opinion regarding the topic.

Violence against women takes many forms. One such form is prostitution, which is a serious social scourge that violates the dignity and rights of women and exposes them to exploitation and violence. [...] Does the Commission consider prostitution to be a serious form of exploitation and violence that should be recognised officially as a serious human rights violation? (Pereira 2019: E-004014/2019/rev.1)

However, in their answer, the Commission only responds to the aspects of violence against women and sexual exploitation as it relates to trafficking. This would be what Allwood (2018: 131) would describe as agenda silencing, where the subject at hand is not addressed and not mentioned further. In the Commission's response to the question which clearly inquires where prostitution fits in the puzzle, it is only mentioned in terms of THB (Johansson 2020: E-004014/2019/rev.1). This is indicative, although the issue of prostitution as it relates to gender equality and VAW has gained traction in the EP, it has not done so in any other EU institution. This may be attributed to the fact that the frames often stay on a soft law level and only truly gain traction when attached to issues that can and have hard policy attached to them, such as THB (Allwood 2018: 131).

There is surprisingly no discernible contemporary effect that affected how prostitution was presented in relation to gender equality issues between 2014–2021, despite larger feminist movements such as the MeToo-movement coinciding with the time span. In the examined data corpus, there are neither any notable peaks nor valleys in the gender equality framing, nor is there any explicit mention of MeToo found in any of the documents. This may be due to the fact that the abolitionist agenda has established a rigid issue linking to what has been deemed “acceptable” frames. Consequently, the lack of contemporary effect could be indicative of the issue, while it is not discussed in the EP or EU at any higher rate, having successfully obtained normative alignment within the EP. However, even with the fact that the issue of prostitution

might have reached a hegemonic status in the EP, the lack of correlation with global trends and debate is interesting. Especially from an abolitionist perspective, which expectedly would have an apt opportunity to further their position by the linkage of VAW and prostitution through the MeToo-movement and the discussion of consent, possibly with the effect of it reaching the agenda of another EU institution (Bacik 2021: 2).

In the structure of frames connected to gender equality, we most clearly see and can draw conclusions based on previous constructs of velvet triangles that still echo in the foundation that they established, which most notably lead to the Honeyball resolution. The coevolution of the EU gender equality policy and the recognition of the issue as a fundamental right steered the possibility of establishing prostitution onto the EU agenda by feminist norm entrepreneurs (Rubio Grundell 2021a: 437). This coevolution originated from the valence issue of violence against women, both in the terms of economic inequalities and patriarchal structures. A valence issue is defined as a consensus regarding the goal of policy (Outshoorn et al. 2015: 173). It is suggested that this unanimity, regarding the furthering of gender equality through the curbing of violence against women, was something that abolitionist advocates wanted to use to their advantage and attempt to include prostitution in the same package.

Stresses that the normalisation of prostitution has an impact on violence against women; points in particular to data that show that men buying sex were more likely to commit sexually coercive acts against women and other acts of violence against women. (2013/2103 (INI))

The quote from the Honeyball resolution above makes the position clear that prostitution leads to VAW. This type of framing, which was established in the years leading up to the Honeyball resolution, separated the notion of choice from prostitution. Consequently, the possible perspective of prostitution as a labor-market issue was eliminated (Rubio Grundell 2021a: 435). From a decriminalization perspective, it is not difficult to understand that the frame of sex work as *work* is one of the strongest arguments to present. In an EU context, applying the labor-market perspective is also among the most dominant bases for the EU to address issues where there is no formal competence present (ibid). In severing the connection between prostitution and labor issues, constellations of prominent abolitionist norm entrepreneurs established the “rules” for how to discuss prostitution in the EP, excluding the sex worker perspective. The rhetoric regarding the relationship between VAW and prostitution is evident in the language of the EP.

Emphasises that violence against women continues to be a significant problem in the EU affecting its victims [...] notes that women’s economic independence plays a crucial role in their ability to escape situations of gender-based violence by taking proactive measures [...] women who are victims of violence in any form, be it domestic violence, trafficking, or prostitution. (2015/2228(INI))

The access to the debate has been limited by agenda-setting and what can be described as a Europeanization of the discourse around prostitution (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 25). Social norms have been established around which issues are to be addressed in relation to prostitution. This affects the EU agenda and thus in turn the accessibility for more marginalized actors such as sex workers activists to be allowed an equal political space (ibid). A clear example of the uneven playing field can be illustrated by the public hearing for the FEMM report late last year (2021). Out of four invited speakers only one, Sabrina Sanchez from ESWA represented a pro-decriminalization perspective. In a letter of concern, ESWA reached out to the EP to criticize the hearing of the FEMM report, and the debate climate, as well as scrutinizing some lines of arguments from the MEPs.

[...] we see how the privileged and well situated policy makers, some of them in the name of gender equality, are attempting to speak on our behalf and trying to ‘protect us from wrongdoing’ by promoting laws that aim to repress and restrict the already limited options we have. This protectionist underpinnings do not challenge gender discrimination, but instead reproduces it in the guise of protecting women. (European Sex Workers Rights Alliance 2021a: 1)

An interesting concept that FitzGerald and Skilbrei (2022: 26) explores is the idea of Europeanness and the harmonization of norms and identity within the EU. This notion is derived from when the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR) established an extended yardstick for EU harmonization, to mark itself as a strong and exemplary international actor and taking steps to expand into a more social Europe, rather than strictly neoliberal (Debusscher 2011: 46). The furthering of these more normative aspects as subjects to harmonization, such as gender equality ideology, has been critiqued as evolving hand in hand with the discourse that the EU stance is the “most good” and progressive (FitzGerald & Skilbrei 2022: 26). François Foret and Lucrecia Rubio Grundell (2020: 1810) underlines this same argument by discussing the evolution of the EU as a polity taking pride in the European image and its self-proclaimed progressive stances. They conclude that prostitution in the EU has managed, even though no real conflict expansion has been realized, to push into the normative, acquiring authority in the shape of becoming a, albeit small, part of the European normative ideal. They further illustrate this in their concluding remarks stating that “[...] to be a good European standing for its values means to uphold a neo-abolitionist regarding prostitution.” (2020: 1811).

This statement is in line with the findings of this thesis. As discussed previously in this chapter, there has been a clearly established status quo in the debate regarding prostitution in the EP, in favor of the neo-abolitionist ideals. The description of an ideal “good European” taking the position of the EU is a clear visual representation of Europeanization and the role of the EP both acting as a structure and an actor, and the large expansion of frame effect present in how gender equality framing influenced the EP. Firstly the uploading of abolitionist ideals to the EU and EP, done historically by for example Swedish norm entrepreneurs promoting the *Nordic model*, and

then an attempt at downloading to other MS from the EP in the pursuit of reaching a consensus on European values – the expectation of the trickle down harmonization to the MS. This might also be the attempt at utilizing all the possible soft law means available to the EP and related actors to influence the debate when no other room for the topic on the EU-level currently exists.

### 5.3 Health care

The third category, health care, is one example of how prostitution is contextualized within the EU. How prostitution is framed in regard to health issues can in itself be categorized into two: (1) speaking on the different societal vulnerabilities *not* in relation to a debate on judicial status, or (2) motivating a judicial opinion based, in part, on health aspects. Both of which are approximately equally common.

In the Honeyball resolution, health care is mentioned in the second manner as described above, with nearly identical phrasing as present in the following quote from the resolution on Promoting Gender Equality in Mental Health and Clinical Research.

Stresses that prostitution is also a health issue, as it has detrimental health impacts on persons in prostitution, who are more likely to suffer from sexual, physical and mental health traumas, drug and alcohol addiction, and loss of self-respect [...] (2016/2096(INI))

This sort of framing alludes strongly to the visualization of sex workers as victims. In the quote above, prostitution, as it relates to health care, is not neutral – rather than creating a call to action on better safety nets for people in prostitution, the text lays more emphasis on prostitution as the problem and attaches a rather high degree of stigma to the issue. However, more ambiguous framing that can be described as rhetorical frames, built more on policy-relevant calls to action, is also present in the empirical material.

The diversity evident among people who use drugs should be recognised and steps should be taken to provide services that can address this diversity and reflect the needs of different groups in relation to problem drug use. Specific groups of people who use drugs and who have drug-use disorders that involve potentially more complex or specific care needs include: [...] people who engage in sex work and prostitution [...]. (2021/C 102 I/01)

The quote above portrays a more neutral ground, calling on diversified action in order to accommodate the special needs of certain groups. Vulnerability is still present as a theme, but the problem is not painted to be prostitution, thus not removing as much agency from the sex workers and in turn lowering the level of stigma.

The level of frame institutionalization of prostitution and health care may be viewed as relatively low. For abolitionists, other frames have dominated to underline the discourse of violence and vulnerability, whereas for pro legalizers much of the frames relating to health care may be



diminished or silenced by the fact that sex workers are not actively excluded from any health care legislation present in member states.

During the examined time period there was one notable contemporary event that affected the attention to sex work and the health care framing, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. In both the 2021 resolution on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality as well as in MEP written questions for the Commission, the economic and health vulnerability of sex workers were brought to attention.

[...] the COVID-19 crisis has also impacted sex workers, increasing their risk of loss of income and poverty, and is characterised by the continued lack of a framework and enforcement of their human rights. (2019/2169(INI))

Sex workers are currently facing increased uncertainty as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and the measures taken by Member State governments. Many encounter obstacles to having access to healthcare and find themselves in a difficult economic situation. Due to the often informal status of their work, they cannot have access to support measures that other workers benefit from. (in 't Veld 2020, E-002587/2020)

In recent years, this might be one of the larger notable impacts on language use and the clear reference to prostitution rights in relation to the right of work and employment safety for sex workers. However, not without facing a bit of scrutiny. In the debate for the implementation of the 2021 EU Strategy for Gender Equality, the following comment was raised by an MEP:

Finally, we cannot help but regret that a strategy for equality refers to prostitution as sex work and not as violence and exploitation. (Pereira 2021) [*Authors translation*]

Even though this was the only comment in the debate to mention the topic, it still points to the skepticism to recognize any level of sex work as an occupation, even when it relates to fundamental rights such as access to health care and preventative measures to poverty. The level of moral implication prostitution as a topic holds is evident, especially when looking through the lens of health care. Health care, an indisputable fundamental right, when mentioned as something to be granted to sex workers as a group, is still often met with hesitation. As if the granting of special services to a specific group would have spill-over effects in the treatment of sex workers, to the detriment of those who view sex work as equal to victimhood. This also speaks to the expanded frame effect that previously mentioned frames such as VAW have had on the topic, as it affects even the conversation of an individual's access to physical and psychological aid.

What stands out in the health care framing is that the terminology of 'sex worker' is much more frequent. This might be connected to the two different ways in which healthcare issues are brought up, as explained in the first paragraph of the chapter. When discussing the vulnerability of sex workers in relation to drug use, sexual health, or pandemic restrictions and risk of infection, sex workers are more prominently here than in any other category of framing talked

about as a profession. Here sex work is framed more in terms of possible socio-economic effects that may affect the working group. In order to try and trace possible norm entrepreneurial effects from other parties attempts were made by the author to try and trace the rapporteurs, possible expert advice, or lobby group influence related to the resolutions, but without success. However, it is evident that ESWA has made strong attempts to spur the inclusion of the sex work perspective in the creation of policies related to both the short and long-term effects of COVID-19 (European Sex Workers Rights Alliance 2020).

One possible explanation for the inclusion of sex work to this degree is that it might be, in part, incidental. Measures taken during COVID-19 include the entire labor market, which also means sex work in some MS, while not being explicitly mentioned in the texts. Evidence of this can be seen in the Commission's response to MEP Sophia in't Veld's (Renew Europe) question regarding whether sex workers qualify for EU COVID-19 support measures:

While it does not intend to single out categories of beneficiaries in the recovery instruments, the Commission remains committed to equality and non-discrimination to ensure that certain groups, including sex workers, are not affected disproportionately. (Schmit 2020: E-002587/2020)

The opinion of the EP is visible through acts, such as Sandra Pereira's comment, where the frame effect has solidified the viewpoint of what the problem is, to the point where the framing is overtly expressed if it is felt to be threatened as if any expression of opinions that are not streamlined with the status quo is unacceptable.

The impact of the health care frame however has not expectedly shaped the opinion of abolitionists but is rather the area in which most sex worker frames are present. It is possibly the area where the sex work frame is the most successful. One possible reason for this is that the area of healthcare does not possess as much of a normative aspect to it, leading to fewer moral arguments or stances being visible. The recent success of sex work positive framing in Europe is an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. One notable example of this is the fact that Belgium changed its legislation on prostitution as a result of sex worker unions advocating for more support during the pandemic (Scarlett 2022).

## 5.4 Human rights

The author has made human rights a category on its own, even though many of the previously mentioned categories touch upon issues related to human rights. The reason is that a lot of the frames present in the material make reference to violations of individual rights, and the possible exploitation of individuals without strong existing societal safety nets, such as migrants. Primarily, the frames present under this category have strong abolitionist connections.

Considers prostitution to be a serious form of violence and exploitation. (2018/2684(RSP))

Virtually every frame present constitutes so-called rhetorical frames. Namely, frames based on evidence of policy-relevant texts that influence the discourse of the debate (Rein & Schön 1996: 90). Examples of this involve the connection between (forced) prostitution and reference to the implementation of ILO Convention No. 29 on forced labor (2013/2115(INI)) or UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security (2014/2152(INI)). When looking at the language used in the texts, there are discernible connections made between how something *is* and how something *ought to be*. Such normative arguments, backed by reference to themes such as human dignity and fundamental rights make strong frames that would expectedly have a wider impact on actor influence and aid in frame institutionalization.

[...] prostitution, trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, for sexual exploitation is a form of slavery and incompatible with human dignity, particularly in countries where the sex industry has been legalised. (2019/2169(INI))

In the example above, prostitution is referenced in relation to sexual exploitation but also in reference to the effects of the legislative approach present. The “ought to be” can be deduced as a change from a legalized sex industry to a criminalized one. The abolitionist view is strongly depicted together with the sense of victimhood of the sex worker who has no apparent agency, but is rather living in a state “incompatible with human dignity”. Similar to the gender equality frames, value words such as violence, exploitation, vulnerability, and dignity are frequent. The position of *prostitution as a societal problem* is further clarified.

Contemporary effects present under this category are the 2015 European migrant crisis, also known as the Syrian refugee crisis. The empirical material from 2014–2016 shows an increase in references relating to migrants/ undocumented people, prostitution, and THB.

[...] the prostitution markets and industry in Europe feed to a large extent on the vulnerability of migrant women and girls, and whereas many women in prostitution are undocumented, which adds to the abuse and vulnerability already inherent in the prostitution industry. (2013/2115(INI))

Recalls that women and children may be compelled to exchange sex for protection, in order to survive, in order to advance along their migratory route, and for basic sustenance; underlines that women and children engaging in survival sex are not considered trafficking victims, and thus cannot receive the required assistance. (2015/2118(INI))

During the refugee crisis, the discourse on the vulnerability of people fleeing from conflict and the effects on the country receiving them translated into the discourse on prostitution. Regulation of prostitution and the perceived state of security of the state nationally and internationally have been linked together by scholars before. Mattson (2016: 12) describes the effects of “unsettled times” often leading to so-called ‘globalization anxieties’ among policy-makers, inciting them to commence a nation-state project, e.g. prostitution reform, in order to strengthen national identity.

This was most clearly seen in the 1999 prostitution reforms in Sweden and the Netherlands, where the level of EU integration was perceived as an “imposed unwelcome compromise” (ibid). Arguably, this same pattern was repeated during the migration crisis in manners that reaffirmed the notion of what the problem of prostitution from an abolitionist perspective is seen to be; vulnerable subjects (sex workers) are both *at risk*, and *a risk* in society (Rubio Grundell 2021b: 19). This link between the rise of prostitution on the agenda and international changes “threatening” the national idea of identity and sovereignty leading to securitization will be further explored in chapter 5.5. However, even though the effect of the crisis on prostitution is notable, it must be reiterated that it is and was small. Even a heightened level of agenda status in the EP is confined to the EP and a select few MEPs that touch upon the subject.

In the material, no reference could be found to a sex work positive frame in relation to this subchapter. However, that does not equal the non-existence of arguments related to human rights from a sex work positive perspective. On the contrary, in 2016 Amnesty International published a policy on *State obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of sex workers*, in which the human rights organization support and advocates for the decriminalization of prostitution. Amnesty expresses that the policy is partly based on recognition of the personal agency of sex workers, and general international human rights principles and calls for the decriminalization of “all aspects of adult consensual sex work” (Amnesty International 2016: 2). Similar stances have also been reiterated by the World Health Organization (2012) and Human Rights Watch (2019).

It is interesting to note that no mention of these decriminalizing perspectives is found in the empirical material nor in the 2021 FEMM Report. This fact has been criticized by ESWA in their Statement of concern regarding the publishing of the latter (European Sex Workers Rights Alliance 2021b: 3). This might be indicative of silencing, as there is a clear discrepancy between the structure of the prostitution debate in Europe versus the EU. Although sex workers are not formally excluded from the debate, the lack of mentions and space in the debate point towards informal, yet active, exclusions or restrictions in the challenging of the status quo.

## 5.5 National and international security

As touched upon in the previous chapter, prostitution is often mentioned in relation to national and international security issues. Primarily, the connection to the trafficking of human beings. THB is a competence of the EU in accordance with article 83 in TFEU. Consequently, the framing of THB has moved into a more strictly security issue rather than a problem of morality, as the issue is recognized as an EU competence based on the cross-border dimension of the crime (Hubbard et al. 2008: 140). As discussed in chapter 2.2, when THB was conferred as a formal competence the opportunity for abolitionists to connect it to prostitution in the EU arose. The 2021 FEMM Report state that in the EU “sex trafficking and prostitution are strictly intertwined,

from a theoretical and practical point of view.” (European Parliament 2021a: 26). Similar framing is present in the analyzed material.

[...] the prostitution market fuels the trafficking of women and children and exacerbates violence against them, particularly in countries where the sex industry has been legalised. (2019/2169(INI))

Stresses that there are a number of links between prostitution and trafficking, and acknowledges that prostitution [...] fuels the trafficking of vulnerable women and minors. (2020/2215(INI))

The reference to prostitution in relation to the prevention of THB is one of clear judicial preference. In the material collected, the Nordic model is linked to a visible decrease in trafficking. However, in the search for unbiased data that indicate whether a clear correlation between prostitution regulation and THB exists, the results are heterogeneous. Summarized findings by the FREE network (2020) show that there is a spectrum of research that point towards the possibilities of both legalized sex work and abolitionism leading to decreases in THB, and that the lack of available data limits the possibility for robust conclusions. This fact is of interest as the lack of statistical certainties is not reflected in the empirical material, rather the agenda of “legal prostitution equals more THB” is presented as undisputed facts.

Europol has reported that ‘there are Member States where prostitution is legal, making it much easier for traffickers to use a legal environment in order to exploit their victims’. (2020/2029(INI))

[...] the types of prostitution where victims of THB are most likely to be found, such as street prostitution, have decreased in countries that have criminalised the purchase of sex and activities generating profits from the prostitution of others. (2015/2118(INI))

The view of prostitution and THB being intrinsically linked expands the notion of where the threat lies. If prostitution leads to THB, then the reasonable stance is that in order to neutralize the threat and to protect the vulnerable the problem, i.e. prostitution, should be eradicated, or abolished. Securitization and the concept of vulnerability as tools for agenda setting prostitution is interwoven in a nexus (Rubio Grundell 2021b: 13). This nexus creates frame connections that stem from an attempt at competence association into the EU remit. As previous chapters have shown, neo-abolitionism has already been established in the EU to such a degree that many of the abolitionist ideas have been Europeanized. It can even be said that the up-loading of normative stances of the Nordic model has evolved into a European prostitution model (Scaramuzzino & Scaramuzzino 2019: 210).

Events that shaped the security frames can, like the human rights category, be related to the 2015 migrant crisis, however, the bulk of the frames related to security is THB which has a steadfast presence in almost all of the collected material. In one of the resolutions, there is a mention of

“internet grooming by terrorist groups” supposedly luring women into prostitution in third countries (2015/2007(INI)), but no other outlier in applied framing is noticeable.

## 5.6 Appeals to action

Finally, the last category of frames is more related to a type of frame rather than the contents of the frames themselves. The attributed meaning of “appeals to action” is mentions of prostitution in relation to urging most commonly the MS or the Commission to action. What is most often illustrated in these types of framings are the notions of the existing images of, again, what the problem and the solution are perceived to be.

Calls on the Commission and the Member States to explore the reasons why women resort to prostitution and ways to discourage demand; underlines the importance of programmes for exiting from prostitution. (2014/2152(INI))

Calls on the Member States to adopt specific measures to combat the economic, social and cultural causes of prostitution and support measures for people who are prostituted to facilitate their social and professional reintegration. (2019/2188(INI))

Demand as a driving factor, combating reasons for entering prostitution, and development of exit programs are all frequently mentioned as aspects that should be considered by policy-makers when legislating prostitution or adjacent policy areas. The common denominator for these action frames is the perceived pattern of sex workers possessing no real agency and in need of aid, and that the focus should lie on criminalization, prevention, and protection.

Emphasises the data which confirm the deterrent effect that criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services has had in Sweden; highlights the normative effect of this model of regulation and its potential to change social attitudes [...] (2015/2118(INI))

Even though these calls to action are rarely acknowledged by any other party, least of all by other EU institutions, these formulations do shape the normative European position. Slowly but surely it has become more and more neo-abolitionist thanks to the soft law policy documents coming from the EP. A lot can be attributed to the norm entrepreneurs and the created velvet triangles stemming from Swedish commitment to export their gender politics into the EU realm. The debate and the two sides present, abolitionists and legalizers, have become one with their respective discourse and thus created an “ownership of arguments” situation. What this means is that, as was described in 5.1, if one party raises an opinion regarding e.g. THB, then the opposing side is attributed the opposing opinion - which creates a false dichotomy.

One example of this can be seen in the quote below from the 2021 EU Strategy for Gender Equality. It shows a more sex work-positive perspective. However, as shown in chapter 5.3 the

statements with these sentiments were criticized by MEP as any notion of sex work as work was not acceptable (Pereira 2021).

Urges the Commission to establish a concrete framework for the rights and protection of sex workers during and after a crisis [...] including measures and strategies that tackle the discrimination faced by sex workers in access to funding, housing, healthcare, education and other services. (2019/2169(INI))

The more recent inclining towards, admittedly hesitant, inclusions of sex work positive frames may be derived from the exposure of vulnerable societal groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. This more recent development may have future implications on the debate that we have yet to see. For example, the effects of Belgium choosing to decriminalize prostitution in 2022 rather than following the status quo of implementing the Nordic model could be the starting point for future research.

The suggestions for actions by MS and the Commission exemplify a lot of the aspects that have been presented in previous chapters. There is a strong status quo present in the discourse on prostitution that limits the playing field of other actors with an opposing view. This is expressed in numerous ways such as the lack of diversified data presented, and the Europeanization of the abolitionist stance as “the progressive stance”. Many times when sex work positive perspectives are mentioned they are met with deflections, interventions, or silencings. Moreover, since the two sides stem from two different understandings of “what the problem is” they have come to be seen as diametrically opposed, even though they share a lot of common ground. The differences between the legislative approaches have even been described as largely symbolic, and rather, linked to questions of national identity and the national view on state intervention (Rubio Grundell 2021b: 2).

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis sought to answer how the discourse of prostitution has been framed in the EP between 2014–2021, a time period chosen based on two formative published documents regarding the topic. The frames collected from the empirical data were categorized into six subchapters in order to address present themes and possible contemporary effects related to them. This proved effective as a pattern of framing emerged that showcased differences between the utilization of frames to evoke certain lines of arguments or to bypass the topic into being silenced. The contemporary gap filled by this research indicates that since the publication of the Honeyball resolution, which explicitly stated a neo-abolitionist view, the perspective has been constantly reaffirmed with a limited playing field for opposing views. More recently, the same frames enabled the publication of the 2021 FEMM report, which emphasized the same messages with little change.

The patterns of frame techniques show two different approaches to presenting the issue, many of which have evolved in tandem. Neo-abolitionist arguments stem from a morality perspective, utilizing arguments that highlight themes of violence, victimhood, and threats to security which limit the agency and autonomy of the individual sex worker and places the focus on the more structural aspects. On the contrary, the sex work positive arguments apply mainly an individual perspective grounded in labor market aspects and the freedom of choice, agency, and rights to safety nets in regard to economic and social policies.

The consistent mentions of prostitution in the empirical material show that the European Parliament attempts at keeping prostitution on the agenda. The neo-abolitionist view has been deemed the solution to the problem, and only in relation to discrimination is sex work mentioned as possessing agency in relation to labor perspectives, and even then it is done with hesitation. When looking at the frame categories, as divided in Table 3, another theme emerges: competence. The common denominator for the type of arguments presented in the resolutions is the connection between prostitution and existing EU competence. The connections to all the main categories: children's rights, gender equality, health care, human rights, and national and international security tell us all the issues that are intertwined with prostitution that have foundation within the EU remit, and that prostitution may thus be allowed on the agenda. However, the divisions in framings, together with the constant quashing by the other EU institutions based on the competence argument, ensure that the issue is not considered for EU decision-making. Even with the EP's attempts, with their creation of the hegemonic "European stance", the issue remains marginalized to the single institution.

The root of neo-abolitionism is largely based on the moral ground that prostitution is incompatible with fundamental rights and thus should be abolished. In the acceptance of neo-abolitionism as the ruling perspective, as was pointed out in chapter 5.2 in regards to the feeling of "Europeanness" and "the good European", it acquires the moral high ground. In the



existing dichotomy of the debate, the opposing side then possesses “the moral burden of proof”. In other words, the arguments put forward by sex work activists must constantly work against the status quo, which has cemented certain arguments as truths, to convince the audience of the legitimacy of their arguments. Examples of these claims are most prominently seen in relation to the gender equality and health care debates. In some cases, the abolitionist view can be seen claiming ownership of certain arguments, thus falsely placing sex work positive actors on the opposing side, this can for example be seen in the discourse surrounding children’s rights. The Europeanization of one perspective, while the question at large is still outside of the EU remit, creates more polarization on the topic than is present in the debate at large.

Visible in the analysis is that no clear temporal or linear change appears to be present in the chosen time period of 2014–2021. However, some prominent trends have nevertheless been noted such as the 2015 migration crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis points to the fact that the Honeyball resolution, although not voted through with a qualified majority, may have still had enough impact to solidify the neo-abolitionist view in the EP to a near point of non-contention. The question that arises from such a possibility is then rather: who needs to heed the call? The continued inclusion of prostitution in resolutions, written questions, and more must then be targeted to a different audience. The EP is shown to use soft law as a tool, seeking simultaneously to download (to MS) and upload (to other EU institutions) the neo-abolitionist perspective. The wish for a harmonized EU is evident, and even though not directly articulated, prostitution is viewed as a multi-national issue.

There are limitations to the result, hindered by aspects of non-debate, or silencings, present in the issue of prostitution and the EU. The empirical material displayed scarce mentions of prostitution, most often taken from resolutions of other contexts such as gender equality strategies and policies regarding human rights or trafficking. As such, conclusions drawn from the material cannot be stated as absolute truths and the true effects and impacts of the position of the EP are still subject to debate. As mentioned, there is a lack of validity in data on the subject, and as such, the impact of the frames is difficult to measure. The author of this thesis set out to combine both structural and actoral perspectives in order to raise the reliability of the results, however, the latter of which proved difficult to trace. However, the frame patterns found reiterate conclusions observed in previous research and contribute to the existing literature through the connection to themes of a desire for greater EU harmonization, and the recognition of accepted norms through soft law applications by the EP. For future research, the application of actor tracing, possibly through the collection of first-hand data, could shed more light on the development and reaffirmation of the position of the EP. A further examination of prostitution as it relates to the idea of the EU as a normative power could similarly advance the research topic of prostitution and the EU.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Documents from the European Parliament

EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 2021/C 102 I/01 INTRODUCTION – Aim, foundations and approach

European Parliament resolution of 4 February 2014 on undocumented women migrants in the European Union (2013/2115(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 25 February 2014 with recommendations to the Commission on combating Violence Against Women (2013/2004(INL))

European Parliament resolution of 26 February 2014 on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality (2013/2103(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 27 February 2014 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2012) (2013/2078(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2014 on the mid-term review of the Stockholm Programme (2013/2024(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2015 on the EU's priorities for the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 (2015/2572(RSP))

European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2015 on the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015 (2014/2152(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2013-2014) (2014/2254(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2015 on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter (2015/2229(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 28 April 2016 on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age (2015/2007(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2016 on implementation of the Directive 2011/36/EU of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims from a gender perspective (2015/2118(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 26 May 2016 on poverty: a gender perspective (2015/2228(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2016 on the fight against trafficking in human beings in the EU's external relations (2015/2340(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 14 February 2017 on promoting gender equality in mental health and clinical research (2016/2096(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2017 on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion, by the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (COM(2016)0109 — 2016/0062(NLE))

European Parliament resolution of 13 February 2019 on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP))

European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2021 on equality between women and men in the European Union in 2018-2020 (2021/2020(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 20 January 2021 on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter — annual report 2019 (2020/2208(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality (2019/2169(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 10 February 2021 on the implementation of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2020/2029(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 10 February 2021 on reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty (2019/2188(INI))

European Parliament resolution of 24 June 2021 on the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25) (Nairobi Summit) (2019/2850(RSP))

European Parliament resolution of 24 June 2021 on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the EU, in the frame of women's health (2020/2215(INI))