



## **Netherlands, The**

### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2000](#)

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The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary legislative system. Executive authority is exercised by the Prime Minister and Cabinet representing the governing political parties (traditionally a coalition of at least two major parties). The bicameral Parliament is elected through free and fair elections. The judiciary is independent.

Regional police forces are primarily responsible for maintaining internal security. The police, the royal constabulary, and investigative organizations concerned with internal and external security are under effective civilian authority.

The market-based economy is export oriented and features a mixture of industry, services, and agriculture. Key industries include chemicals, oil refining, natural gas, machinery, and electronics. The agricultural sector produces fruit, vegetables, flowers, meat, and dairy products. Living standards and the level of social benefits are high. Unemployment is 2.7 percent; however, long-term unemployment, particularly among ethnic minorities, remains a problem.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provide effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Problems include violence and discrimination against women, child abuse, trafficking in women and children, and discrimination against minorities. The Government is taking steps to deal with all of these problems.

Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, which are two autonomous regions of the kingdom, also feature parliamentary systems and full constitutional protection of human rights. In practice respect for human rights in these islands generally is little different from that in the European Netherlands. The islands' prison conditions remain substandard.

#### RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

##### Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

###### a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no reports of political or other extrajudicial killings.

###### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

###### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that officials employed them.

The Government took steps in 1999 to facilitate the filing of complaints about police behavior, to create uniform complaint procedures, and to ensure that complaints are assessed by an independent committee.

Prison conditions in the Netherlands meet minimum international standards, and the Government permits visits by human rights monitors.

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) has urged the Governments of the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, and Aruba to improve the "inhuman" conditions in Curacao's Koraal Specht prison and in cell blocks at the police stations on the islands of St. Maarten, Bonaire, and Aruba. The CPT's criticism focused on overcrowding, extremely poor sanitary conditions, poor food, and insufficient ventilation. The Committee also criticized widespread corruption and the mistreatment of prisoners by guards at Koraal Specht. In May the CPT specifically criticized the Government for not doing enough to prevent outbursts of violence among prisoners--including sexual assaults--and the use of riot police to guard prisoners at the Koraal Specht prison.

The Dutch Government repeatedly offered financial assistance to the Government of the Netherlands Antilles for the construction of a new juvenile wing, a maximum security facility, and other improvements at Koraal Specht. The Government also sent experts on prison organization and the training of guards. Steady progress has been made in improving conditions (prisoners now have mattresses, hygiene and food have improved, and construction began on a new wing to relieve overcrowding). The entire prison complex is being renovated, and a new facility is being built. The Antillean Government reached agreement with a private company to supply expert personnel who are to reorganize prison management and train mid-level staff during a period of 1 year. The management team began work on September 1 and is being paid by the Dutch Government. New wardens and security guards also were hired.

The Governments of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba allow access by nongovernmental organizations to prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile, and the Government observes this prohibition.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government respects this provision in practice. The judiciary provides citizens with a fair and efficient judicial process.

The judicial system is based on the Napoleonic Code. A pyramidal system of cantonal, district, and appellate courts handles both criminal and civil cases. The Supreme Court acts as the highest appellate court and ensures the uniform interpretation of the law. In criminal trials, the law provides for a presumption of innocence and the right to public trial, to counsel (virtually free for low income persons), and to appeal. The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and the independent judiciary vigorously enforces this right.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such practices, government authorities generally respect these prohibitions, and violations are subject to effective legal sanction.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government respects these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combine to ensure freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government respects them in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. State subsidies are provided to religious organizations that maintain educational facilities.

#### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government respects them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government cooperates with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. There were no reports of the forced expulsion of those having a valid claim to refugee status. The Government does not provide first asylum as such, but most asylum seekers (86 percent in 1999), except those who obviously came from a "safe country of origin" or stayed for some time in a "safe third country," are permitted to apply for resident status. In 1999 the Government turned down 75 percent of the asylum requests that were processed. However, up to 30 percent of those whose applications were denied nonetheless were permitted to stay temporarily on humanitarian grounds or as long as their country of origin was considered unsafe.

The Government's asylum policy is designed to protect genuine refugees while excluding economic migrants and illegal immigrants. In the early 1990's, the Government adopted several measures to curb the relatively high influx of asylum seekers. This policy initially resulted in the desired decrease, but as other countries adopted even stricter laws, the influx rose again to 45,217 in 1998, a 31 percent increase over 1997. In 1999 the number of asylum seekers fell to 41,306. A new series of harsher rules aims to discourage economic migrants at all stages of the asylum process, by means of a stricter intake, the accelerated processing of asylum requests, limited appeal procedures, and a denial of social assistance to asylum seekers who are screened out. Several of the measures are scheduled to come into effect in 2001.

The Justice Ministry estimates on the basis of interviews with applicants that two-thirds of asylum seekers came to the country via alien smuggling organizations.

#### Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

No restrictions in law or in practice hinder the participation of women and minorities in government and politics; women are nevertheless underrepresented. A total of 52 of the 150 members of the second chamber of Parliament are women, as are 4 of the 15 cabinet ministers. However, the two Deputy Prime Ministers are women. The Government pursues an active policy to promote the participation of women in politics and public administration.

Although a minority, women also hold positions in the Parliaments and Cabinets of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

#### Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Human rights groups operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials are very cooperative and responsive to their views.

In view of its longstanding tradition of hosting international legal tribunals, the Government facilitated the trial of two Libyans accused of the bombing of PanAm flight 103 on December 21, 1988, which killed 270 persons. By agreement among the parties, the Government provided Camp Zeist to the United Kingdom as an extraterritorial venue for the trial, which began in 1999 and is being conducted under Scottish law. The trial continued at year's end.

The Government also hosts the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the headquarters of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

#### Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution bans discrimination on the basis of any of these factors or political preference. The

Government generally is effective in enforcing these provisions. Under the Equal Treatment Act, complainants may take offenders to court under civil law.

## Women

Violence against women is a problem. A recent report by the Utrecht University's human rights department showed that about 1 out of 25 women, particularly of ethnic minority groups, are victims of violence by their former and present partners. Each year 60 to 80 women and 40 children die of domestic violence.

The Government supports programs to reduce and prevent violence against women. Battered women find refuge in a network of 48 government-subsidized shelters offering the services of social workers and psychologists. In addition battered women who leave their domestic partners become eligible for social benefits, which include an adequate basic subsidy as well as an allowance for dependent children. Nongovernmental organizations also advise and assist women who are victims of sexual assault. Marital rape is a crime and carries the same penalty as nonmarital rape, a maximum of 8 years' imprisonment. Spousal abuse carries a one-third higher penalty than ordinary battery.

In addition to helping victims of sexual abuse, the Government has pursued an active prevention campaign through commercials and awareness training of educators. A recent evaluation showed that, on average, the campaign positively influenced two-thirds of the population.

Prostitution is legal, and since 1999 the law no longer treats "organizing the prostitution of somebody else" as a crime when done with the consent of the prostitute. However, any form of forced prostitution remains punishable. All brothels now require licenses issued by local governments with strict conditions to be observed by brothel owners. The Government's assumption is that by decriminalizing prostitution, licensing brothel operators, and improving working conditions and health care for prostitutes, while at the same time prohibiting the employment of minors and illegal immigrants, prostitution would be less susceptible to criminal organizations trafficking in women and children. An additional advantage is that the licensing system would make prostitution more transparent and easier for the police to monitor. Between 20,000 and 30,000 individuals are employed in prostitution. It is estimated that half of all prostitutes originate in non-European Union countries and are residing illegally in the country. Trafficking in women for the purpose of forced prostitution remains a problem, which the Government is giving priority to fighting (see Section 6.f.).

The law requires employers to take measures to protect workers from sexual harassment; research shows that about 245,000 women, or 6.6 percent of the female working population, are confronted with sexual intimidation in the work place each year. The Government funds an ongoing publicity campaign to increase awareness of the problem. As the largest employer, it has taken measures to counter harassment among civil servants, for example, in the police force.

Women increasingly are entering the job market, but traditional cultural factors and an inadequate number of day care facilities tend to discourage them--especially women with young children--from working. One-third of women stop working after the birth of their first child. The participation of women in the labor market increased significantly in the last 25 years, from 29 percent of the working-age female population in 1975 to 58 percent in 2000. The Government wants to raise this figure to at least 65 percent in 2010 through various measures, including an expansion of child care facilities and special leave programs. About 42 percent of women hold part-time jobs. In 1998 the Government established favorable conditions for part-time employment by adopting a law that prohibits employers from treating part-time workers differently from those in full-time jobs.

Women often are underemployed and have less chance of promotion than their male colleagues. They often hold lower level positions than men, mostly because of their part-time status. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the difference in earnings between men and women is 23 percent. Some women nevertheless are making steady progress by moving into professional and high-visibility jobs.

In 1988 the Government started affirmative action programs for women. Collective labor agreements usually include one or more provisions to strengthen the position of women. Legislation mandates equal pay for equal work, prohibits dismissal because of marriage, pregnancy, or motherhood, and provides the basis for equality in other employment-related areas. A legislatively mandated Equal Treatment Commission actively pursues complaints of discrimination in these areas as well as allegations of pay discrimination.

The social welfare and national health systems provide considerable assistance to working women with families. Women are eligible for 16 weeks of maternity leave with full pay. The Parental Leave Law allows parents to take (unpaid) full-time leave during 3 months and to extend the leave over a period longer than 6 months to care for children up to 8 years old. Persons working fewer than 20 hours per week also are entitled

to parental leave.

#### Children

The Government works to ensure the well-being of children through numerous well-funded health, education, and public information programs. The Council for the Protection of Children, operated through the Ministry of Justice, enforces child support orders, investigates cases of child abuse, and recommends remedies ranging from counseling to withdrawal of parental rights. The Government also maintains a popular hot line for children and a network of pediatricians who track suspected cases of child abuse on a confidential basis.

An estimated 50,000 children are victims of child abuse each year, although only approximately 15,000 formal reports of child abuse are registered. As a result of abuse, 40 children died in 1998. The U.N. Commission on Children's Rights in 1999 questioned the Government about its performance in this area. In particular the United Nations questioned the long waiting list for assistance to abused children. Approximately 7,000 abused children are on the waiting list.

The age of consent is 16. Sexual intercourse with minors under age 12 always constitutes a criminal offense; in cases involving minors between the ages of 12 and 16, an interested party must file a complaint. The new prostitution law imposes heavier penalties on prostitution activities involving minors. Maximum penalties vary between 6 years' imprisonment for sex with minors (in the context of prostitution) under age 18, 8 years for sex with minors under 16 years of age, and 10 for sex with minors under 12 years. International sex tourism involving the abuse of minor children is prosecutable. Since 1996 several Dutch citizens have been tried and convicted for the abuse of minors in other countries.

Trafficking in female African youths for the purpose of prostitution is a problem (see Section 6.f.).

The maximum penalty for child pornography is 4 years' imprisonment and 6 years in the event of financial gain. The law allows for provisional arrest, house searches, and criminal financial investigations. The mere possession of child pornography is punishable, but exemptions are made for scientific or educational use. However, these exemptions caused some problems with two child pornographic collections claimed to be of historic value. The age at which minors are allowed to act in pornographic movies was expected to be raised shortly from 16 to 18 years.

The Government has begun a national offensive against child pornography on the Internet. The police monitored the Internet in a yearlong pilot project that ended in August. Another police investigation showed that child pornography on the Internet has increased. The police discovered that a large portion of new photographs are processed digitally into pornographic material. The law does not yet include a provision to fight this new form of child pornography. The current law is aimed at the abuse of children, but the children shown on the manipulated pictures in fact have not been abused.

#### People with Disabilities

There is no discrimination against disabled persons in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. Local governments increasingly mandate access to public buildings for the disabled.

#### Religious Minorities

There were a number of complaints about anti-Semitism on Internet sites set up by Dutch citizens.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The traditionally homogeneous nature of society has changed in recent decades due to the influx of immigrants and asylum seekers who make up about 9 percent of the population. Despite comprehensive policies to promote the integration of racial and ethnic minorities, integration remains a problem. In general citizens are averse to discrimination and unequal treatment and support integration. Society has become increasingly alert to racial discrimination, and various organizations monitor violations.

The Government pursues an active campaign aimed at increasing public awareness of racism and discrimination. According to the latest statistics, 112 persons or organizations were tried on discrimination charges in 1997 (latest statistics available). The chief public prosecutor set up the National Expertise Center on Discrimination in 2000 to improve the prosecution's handling of discrimination cases.

A central government organization was set up in 1999 to fight racial discrimination and to collect nationwide statistics on incidents of discrimination, but it has yet to work out a uniform system. The 29 local antidiscrimination bureaus together registered about 3,000 complaints per year in recent years. Many complaints concern discrimination in the workplace.

In 1998 the Equal Opportunities Committee received 104 complaints relating to race or nationality and ruled in 53 cases of discrimination. Its rulings on such issues as headscarves, dismissal, accent, and language requirements are of major importance because they are applied widely. Most complaints concerned the labor market, including denial of promotion, discrimination in the work place, unequal pay, and dismissal.

At the request of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the University of Leiden each year investigates the extent of rightwing and racist violence. It reported an increase from 201 registered incidents in 1996 to 313 in 1998, but it assumed that the problem is more widespread because many cases remain unregistered. The 313 cases in 1998 were subdivided as follows: Threats 157; abuse 41; painting slogans 41; vandalism 27; bomb threat 23; other 24. Only a limited number of incidents can be attributed to rightwing extremism: about 19 percent of the 313 cases in 1998. However, that percentage was much higher in the past, which may be connected with the steady decline in membership of rightwing groups from about 1,400 in 1997 to some 600 in 1999. Most of the racist violence is committed at random and arbitrarily by youths often under the influence of alcohol. The culprits rarely are tracked down. In 1998 the culprits were identified in only 22 of the 313 cases. Only half of all discrimination cases are prosecuted.

Immigrant groups also face some discrimination in housing and employment. These groups, concentrated in the larger cities, suffer from a high rate of unemployment. The Government has worked for several years with employers' groups and unions to reduce minority unemployment levels to the national average.

The 1998 Act on the Stimulation of Labor Participation by Ethnic Minorities is intended to increase job opportunities for ethnic minorities. It requires employers with a work force of over 35 persons to register their non-Dutch employees. Employers are to strive for a composition of their work force that reflects the regional working population. They must submit their annual social action plans, including recruitment targets, to the regional labor bureaus. The Labor Inspectorate oversees implementation of the law. Despite these efforts, unemployment among ethnic minorities is still about four times higher than within the ethnically Dutch workforce. In May the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination criticized the Government for not doing enough to prevent discrimination in hiring. It recommended that the Government take steps to reduce segregation in schools and create a police force whose composition reflects the entire population.

A campaign beginning in April, in which several ministries, government job centers, and the Dutch small business association pledged to find jobs for some 20,000 persons from ethnic minorities before May 2001, had succeeded in recruiting just 240 persons by the end of August.

With the proliferation of Internet web sites, the dissemination of racial and discriminatory material on Internet has also increased. The privately run Discrimination on the Internet Registration Center received 181 complaints in 1999 about 360 controversial statements, subdivided by category as follows: Racism 147, anti-Semitism 91, denial of the Holocaust 21, sexual preference 46, religion 15, discrimination against asylum seekers 12, incitement to violence 6, and "other" 19. It also investigates web sites and home pages on its own. Over 70 percent of the statements are removed voluntarily at the Center's request. In 2 cases in 1999, the Center requested that criminal proceedings be initiated; such a request was still under review in 18 other cases; and another 25 cases were being prepared. Four cases were passed on to the Government's antidiscrimination office for action.

## Section 6 Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

Membership in labor unions is open to all workers including armed forces personnel, the police, and civil service employees. Workers are entitled to form or join unions of their own choosing without prior government authorization, and unions are free to affiliate with national trade union federations. This right is exercised freely.

Unions are free of control by the Government and political parties. Union members may and do participate in political activities.

All workers have the right to strike, except for most civil servants who have other institutionalized means of protection and redress. Industrial relations are very harmonious, and strikes are infrequent. In 1999 some 75 labor days per 1,000 workers were lost, mostly over union demands for higher pay and a 36-hour workweek.

By law retribution against striking workers is prohibited.

About 28 percent of the work force is unionized, but union-negotiated collective bargaining agreements usually are extended to cover about three-quarters of the work force. The white-collar unions' membership is the fastest growing.

The three union federations are active internationally, without restriction.

#### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The right to organize and bargain collectively is recognized and well established. Discrimination against workers because of union membership is illegal and does not occur.

Collective bargaining agreements are negotiated in the framework of the "Social Partnership" developed between trade unions and private employers. Representatives of the main union federations, employers' organizations, and the Government meet each autumn to discuss labor issues, including wage levels and their relation to the state of the economy and to international competition. The discussions lead to a central accord with social as well as economic goals for the coming year. Under this umbrella agreement, unions and employers in various sectors negotiate sectoral agreements, which the Government usually extends to all companies in the sector.

Antiunion discrimination is prohibited. Union federations and employers' organizations are represented, along with independent experts, on the Social and Economic Council. The Council is the major advisory board for the Government on policies and legislation regarding national and international social and economic matters.

There are no export processing zones.

#### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

Forced or compulsory labor, including that performed by children, is prohibited by the Constitution and generally does not occur; however, trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of forced prostitution is a problem (see Sections 5 and 6.f.).

#### d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 16 years. Mandatory attendance at school ends at age 16, or after at least 12 years of education. Those still in school at the age of 16 may not work more than 8 hours per week. The law prohibits persons under the age of 18 from working at night, overtime, or in areas dangerous to their physical or mental well-being. Anyone working more than 4 1/2 hours per day is entitled to a 30-minute break. The laws are enforced effectively by the tripartite Labor Commission, which monitors hiring practices and conducts inspections.

Holiday work and after school jobs are subject to very strict rules, which are set in the Work Time Act, the Child Labor Regulation (for children under age 16), and the Working Conditions Decree. Observance of the rules is overseen by the Social Ministry's Labor Inspection Office. Although child labor is banned, an increasing number of children work for pay during holidays. The parents of such children are to be reported officially by labor inspectors, and the Public Prosecutor may decide to prosecute the parents for violating the ban on child labor. In 1999 the labor inspections showed that one out of four companies violated the regulations applying to holiday work, including by employing children under age 13.

The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children, and this prohibition is enforced effectively (see Section 6.c.).

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage for adults is established by law and can be adjusted every 6 months to changes in the cost-of-living index. Over the last few years, the statutory minimum wage has been pegged to the average wage in collective labor contracts. The gross minimum wage is about \$1,000 (2,448 guilders) per month. For workers earning the minimum wage, employers currently pay \$3,750 a year (6,000 guilders) in premiums for social security benefits, which includes medical insurance. Only 3 percent of workers earn the minimum wage because collective bargaining agreements, which normally are extended across a sector, usually set a

minimum wage well above the legislated minimum. The Government, unions, and employers have taken measures to increase the number of minimum wage jobs and to decrease employers' social payments in order to lower the cost of hiring new workers and to create more jobs, especially for the long-term unemployed.

A reduced minimum wage applies to young persons under the age of 23--one of the groups with the highest rate of unemployment--and is intended to provide incentives for their employment. This wage ranges from 34.5 percent of the adult minimum wage for workers 16 years of age to 85 percent for those 22 years of age. The legislated minimum wage and social benefits available to all minimum wage earners provide an adequate standard of living for workers and their families.

Although the law sets a 40-hour workweek, the average workweek for those with full-time jobs is 37 1/2 hours. This workweek is the result of agreements reached in collective bargaining on shorter workweeks, often in conjunction with more flexible working hours. This combination makes it possible to adapt shorter working hours to the specific situation in a particular business or branch of industry.

Working conditions, including comprehensive occupational safety and health standards set by law and regulations, are monitored actively by the tripartite Labor Commission. Enforcement is effective. Workers may refuse to continue working at a hazardous work site. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs also monitors standards through its Labor Inspectorate.

#### f. Trafficking in Persons

The law specifically criminalizes alien smuggling and trafficking in persons, both of which are problems. The maximum sentence for trafficking in persons is 6 years. In cases involving minors, severe physical violence, or organized trafficking, the maximum sentence is 10 years. The maximum sentence for alien smuggling is 8 years.

The Government has an active policy to combat trafficking in persons, including a more aggressive prosecution policy as well as closer international cooperation. A number of police forces have established special units to deal with the problem. The Justice Minister appointed a national rapporteur on trafficking in persons in April. The rapporteur is to study the extent of the problem and report annually to the Government.

The country is a major destination for trafficked women. According to the Justice Ministry, 20,000 to 30,000 persons work in prostitution, about half of them illegal residents from non-EU countries. Many come from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Eastern Europe, and Nigeria. The Foundation Against Trafficking in Women estimates that each year some 3,000 women and girls are brought into the country for the purpose of prostitution. With the introduction of the new prostitution law, which prohibits the employment of prostitutes in the country illegally, the Government seeks to intensify the fight against criminal organizations trafficking in women and children (see Section 5).

In 1998 a ruling was obtained under the Aliens Law to prevent illegal residents, who may have become victims of trafficking, from being expelled before investigations are completed. Victims are allowed 3 months to consider pressing charges. Victims who do so are allowed to stay in the country until the judicial process is completed. During this period, victims receive legal, financial, and psychological assistance. In special circumstances, residence permits are granted on humanitarian grounds. After completion of the judicial process, illegal prostitutes returning to their native countries are eligible for temporary financial assistance.

African women, in particular those from Nigeria, make up a sizeable portion of foreign women illegally working as prostitutes. According to the authorities, the most widely used ploy for trafficking African women is the fraudulent use of special asylum procedures for minors, who are virtually ensured entry. Although most such women are not actually under age 18, all claim to be. Once at the open-door asylum center, they remain for a few days and then disappear, only to turn up later as prostitutes in the country or elsewhere in Europe. Most such young African women are under extreme pressure to work as prostitutes. According to the Terre des Hommes organization, their families have signed contracts with trafficking organizations, often sanctioned by "voodoo" priests. The girls strongly believe in the magical power of voodoo.

A Dutch study of prostitutes from Central and Eastern Europe shows that five out of six, "liberated" from trafficking organizations in the Netherlands, knew exactly that they were to be employed in the sex industry when they accepted the offer of their recruiters. Some 40 percent already had worked as prostitutes in their native country. The study concluded that most such women came to the Netherlands voluntarily, and only after their arrival, did they become victims of their traffickers. They are often treated as slaves: intimidated, threatened, and locked up.

[End.]