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PRESS RELEASE

A new measure of the economic importance of prostitution in Belgium

From the point of view of society, prostitution has various facets. For the national accounts, prostitution services are transactions with economic value.

An first estimate of these services was included in the 2014 national accounts and was based on a demand-driven method. Eurostat's preference for a supply-based method led to a revision. The new estimate of the economic importance of prostitution services in Belgium was developed by the University of Leuven in a joint project with the National Bank of Belgium, and will be included in the detailed national accounts to be published on 30 September 2015 and is described in [the research report](#).

Most existing estimates of prostitution are based on a lot of assumptions and few tangible data. The data collection is difficult and there is a lack of sufficiently accurate and reliable information. The new study is therefore based primarily on direct observations of transactions and prices. Assumptions are avoided whenever possible. Confidence intervals are estimated for all values, thus indicating the upper and lower boundaries of each value.

The report gathers data on the supply side. It was decided to begin by estimating one segment as accurately as possible, namely 'window' prostitution which is geographically concentrated in a small number of urban districts. First, direct observations provide an estimate of the average occupancy of the window. These observations are staggered in order to be representative of the 24-hour economy and fluctuations through the week. At the same time, additional measurements during the summer months allow to compute seasonally adjusted data. The study thus estimates the supply in each prostitution district. Apart from these supply estimates, data on the number of transactions or customers per hour worked were also collected in a second observation phase. Combining the two sources made possible to produce an estimate of the total number of transactions and of the incomes in prostitution districts for 2015.

These results were then extrapolated to other prostitution segments such as brothels, massage parlours and escort services. In the case of heterosexual prostitution, the researchers used internet traffic in which customers share their experiences. A principal component analysis indicates that discussions, reviews and page views can provide an estimate of the market share -in transactions- of all segments of heterosexual prostitution. Escort services and private prostitution make up by far the largest segment of heterosexual prostitution, at 42 % of all transactions. Window prostitution accounts for just below 30 % of the market, while brothels, clubs and massage parlours represent just over a quarter. Street prostitution is the smallest segment, representing less than 1 % of transactions in the heterosexual prostitution market. The same internet sources offer information on the average transaction price per prostitution market segment. The number of transactions multiplied by the average price formed the basis of an estimated turnover per prostitution segment in Belgium.

To allow for prostitution by male sex workers, it was decided, on the basis of external data, to increase the heterosexual prostitution market by a conservative 5 %.

The result of the study is a consolidated estimate of prostitution turnover in Belgium in the year 2015 (table). The residency of the service providers was also taken into account to allow a distinction between domestically produced services and imported services in accordance with the definitions of the national accounts. Estimated imports amount to € 53.7 million. Intermediate consumption, this is expenditure on goods /services used for the provision of the service (f.i. rent for a building) was estimated to amount 20 % of output. The resulting value added of prostitution in Belgium comes to € 653.3 million for 2015, which is significantly higher than the initial estimate included in the September 2014 national accounts, where value added amounted to € 324 million for the year 2010. The main reason for this difference is the new estimate of the "escort and private services" segment which was strongly underestimated by the old methodology.

Key figures (2015, in euro, estimations)

Turnover	
Heterosexual prostitution	840 498 687
<i>Window prostitution,</i>	148 814 291
<i>Street prostitution</i>	5 457 692
<i>Clubs and brothels</i>	90 572 622
<i>Massage parlours</i>	119 387 960
<i>Escort services and private prostitution</i>	476 266 121
Prostitution by male sex worker	29 798 164
Total turnover in Belgium	870 296 851
Imports	53 683 684
Domestic production	816 613 167
Intermediate consumption	163 322 633
Value added	653 290 534
