

RESISTING THE PROSTITUTION SYSTEM'S BACKLASH

The Importance of Transnational Unity to Protect Women's Civic Space

To protect women's rights, women's rights organisations (WROs) must build international alliances capable of resisting the backlash that seeks to normalise the violence of the prostitution system.

On April 13, 2026, the French National Assembly hosted the 10th anniversary of the 2016 abolitionist law. This legislation marks a paradigm shift in recognising prostitution as a form of violence: it ceased the criminalisation of prostituted persons, overwhelming majority of which are women, to focus instead on the accountability of buyers of sexual acts.

This event demonstrated that the struggle for women's civic space is inseparable from the fight against our commodification. Faced with a globalising prostitution industry, the response from women's rights organisations must be equally unified and transnational.

A Global Feminist Front Reunited in Paris

This international summit - featuring representatives from 29 countries and survivors from around the world - testified to the universality of this combat and illustrated abolitionism as a global movement.

This international solidarity is crucial: it allows activists to break their isolation in the face of pressure from lobbies that attempt to diminish the political influence of women's rights defenders everywhere.

The European Contrast: Failure of the Regulatory Model

The debates highlighted the divide between two conflicting visions of Europe. In Germany, the regulatory model - which legalises pimping as a commercial activity - is described as a humanitarian disaster. Kerstin Neuhaus from Bundesverband Nordisches Modell, recalled that under this law, Germany has become "the biggest brothel in Europe" with tragic consequences.

In contrast, Sweden, a pioneer of abolitionism, demonstrates the law's effectiveness. Janna Davidson, National Rapporteur on Trafficking stated that 30 years after its adoption, "the fight against prostitution has a preventive effect" and a "real impact" is on reducing demand.

The Reality of the System: Survivors' Voices Marked by Pain

Testimonies from survivors present at the Assembly recalled the severity of the violence endured within the prostitution system. Far from any romanticised vision, their accounts were marked by pain and harshness of the system's reality. Noémie, an activist and survivor, used unequivocal terms to describe the experience of prostituted persons: "What you went through had a name: torture." The purchase of a sex act cannot be separated from its inherent violence.

MOTERIS: A European Strategy Against Backlash

The MOTERIS project joins abolitionist activists in Europe in reaffirming a common objective: to strengthen the capacity of Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) enabling them to resist the backlash driven by the prostitution system.

Across Europe, organisations denouncing the prostitution system are seeing their civic space shrink due to massive cyber-harassment, media delegitimisation, or budget cuts.

MOTERIS offers tools to measure these attacks and strengthen the resilience of women's rights organisations across Europe. By creating networks of resilience, we ensure that abolitionist voices continue to carry weight against the patriarchal offensives.