



## DECRIMINALISING PROSTITUTION



COMMITTEE: HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

In the modern era, sex work has been criminalised in order to protect men and women coerced into prostitution, however it is important to consider the merits of decriminalising prostitution, or reducing regulation associated with it. In August 2015, Amnesty International advocated for “prostitution as a human right” which captured the interest of many other human rights movements and has introduced this narrative into national policy decisions.

Countries have taken different approaches to this issue, such as legalising the sale of sex but exempting pimping and brothels, criminalising it completely or making only the purchase of sex illegal, such as in Canada. Prostitution is an enormous business worldwide with its estimated value of \$186 billion and nations should consider carefully whether this should be oppressed by laws. It has been shown that during the development of these policies and legal actions regarding prostitution, sex workers are rarely representing or present during these agreements.

In the eyes of many, sex workers are merely a victim of circumstance or the product of poor lifestyle choices, however these preconceived notions ignore the professional trade where reputable businesses have been established. It must be considered that in many cases, sex work is just that: work. The digital revolution has encouraged prostitution that is safer for both parties; the website ‘Britain’s Ugly Mugs’ circulates the details of clients to avoid violent or dangerous situations.

A significant argument for decriminalising prostitution is the protection of these sex workers. If prostitution is forced underground by the law, this could provoke further risks of abuse and adverse health whilst discouraging prostitutes from seeking help from the police or medical centres if their profession is made illegal.

However, it is clear that a proportion of sex workers are forced into the trade against their will, therefore decriminalising prostitution might assist sex traffickers. Since sex work was legalised in Germany, the number of women trafficked has dramatically increased. Prostitution can also be intrinsically linked to drug and alcohol abuse, with many selling sex to support their drug habits and addictions. In many cities, the price of sex is almost directly tied to the price of crack cocaine and heroin.

### *History of Prostitution*

Prostitution has been present in societies for centuries with a place in the culture and history of most civilisations. Italian courtesans had incredible freedom as prostitutes, allowed to study freely and considered the best educated and most cultured women of their time. The Oiran in Japan’s Edo period were prostitutes considered skilled enough to entertain nobles, using eloquent speech with the ability to maintain their own power and influence. Ancient Greece had a prominent history of prostitution and the auletrides were featured in countless works of art and literature as accomplished singers, gymnasts and dancers.

### To consider

- How would the safety of prostitutes be ensured if it were fully decriminalised?
- To what extent should prostitution be left to individuals – is there a compromise that can be reached such as “tolerance zones”?
- How can countries distinguish between forced prostitution in sex trafficking and voluntary prostitution?