

**Submission from CEASE (the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation) to the Special Rapporteur on VAWG for her report on prostitution and VAWG**

**About CEASE**

[CEASE](https://cease.org.uk/) is a UK based charity working to expose and dismantle the cultural and commercial drivers behind all forms of sexual exploitation in the UK. We shine a light on what sexual exploitation is, where it occurs and how it contravenes human rights. We campaign for new and better laws, advocate for policy change and hold the global sex industry to account.

**Evidence for Selected Questions**

**2.**

Intersecting vulnerabilities such as poverty, a history of sexual and physical abuse and neglect, age, race and ethnicity are all mitigating factors in a person’s entry into prostitution.

According to a report by the UK [All Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation](https://www.appg-cse.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Bust-the-Business-Model.pdf) the majority of women involved in sexual exploitation were highly vulnerable before their involvement in prostitution:

* Approximately 50% were paid for sex acts before they were 18 years old.
* Up to 95% of women in street prostitution are believed to be problematic drug users.
* A study involving 133 women in prostitution in five locations across England found that over half of the women had been raped or indecently assaulted.

The recent COVID pandemic, as well as the current [cost of living crisis in the UK is driving more and more women into prostitution](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/cost-of-living-crisis-women-sex-work-energy-bills-b1019888.html), as means of survival.

A [2016 report commissioned by the House of Commons](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/26/26.pdf) estimated that approximately 72,800 individuals are involved in prostitution in the UK, with approximately 32,000 of this group based in London. An estimated 95% of this group were women. Other research included in this report estimates that 17,000 migrant women were involved in prostitution in England and Wales, with 15% reporting being trafficked.

**3.**

The [All Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation](https://www.appg-cse.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Bust-the-Business-Model.pdf) has found that the men in the UK, who are most likely to have paid for sex are single, aged 25-34, in professional occupations and report high numbers of (unpaid) sexual partners. This is consistent with [global research](https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf) on men who pay for sex.

In [another study of British men who purchased sex](https://i1.cmsfiles.com/eaves/2012/04/MenWhoBuySex-89396b.pdf), the average age of participants was 38 years old, over half of participants identified as White British, and 88% of participants identified as heterosexual. 12% reported buying over 130 women throughout their lifetimes. 65% believed “most men” purchased sex at some point or another. 60% purchased sex at a brothel. Nearly half of the interviewed participants also reported purchasing sex abroad. 24% believed the concept of rape did not exist for women in prostitution – similarly, 27% reported they believed after purchase, a man was entitled to any sort of act with a woman in prostitution.

A [2016 report commissioned by the House of Commons](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/26/26.pdf) found that 11% of British men between the ages of 16 – 74 reported paying for sex on at least one occasion.

The exchange of sexual services for money is legal in the UK (apart from in Northern Ireland where it's illegal to pay for sex, and those who sell sex are decriminalised). However, more than 30 associated activities are criminalised, including: soliciting sex on the street; kerb crawling; causing / inciting prostitution or controlling it for personal gain (i.e. pimping); brothel-keeping; and the buying of sex from trafficked individuals. That said, data obtained by [NordicModelNow!](https://nordicmodelnow.org/2023/10/24/has-prostitution-effectively-been-decriminalised-in-england-and-wales-while-we-werent-looking/)  tracking prosecutions and convictions of the various prostitution-related offences that are in force in England and Wales found that police forces do not enforce the law and that these offences have become more or less decriminalised.

In the UK websites have increasingly become a mechanism for individuals to purchase sex. In 2021, the [Cross-Party Group on Sexual Exploitation](https://www.appg-cse.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Online-Pimping-CPG-report.pdf) reported that websites, notably VivaStreet, significantly lowered the barriers to access, making it easier for individuals to purchase sex online. These websites do little to protect the safety of women, frequently profiting from exploitation, yet they continue to [operate with impunity.](https://nordicmodelnow.org/2023/08/08/the-new-national-police-sex-work-guidance-the-good-the-bad-and-the-downright-shameful/)

**4.**

[Prostitution has serious long-term effects](https://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOSE_10-Reasons-to-Oppose-Full-Decrim_FINAL_web-version_w-citations_2-15-22.pdf) on the physical, mental and psychological health of prostituted people, whether it’s legal or fully decriminalized, occurs indoors or outdoors, online or off.

A [study](https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostitution-trafficking-in-nine-countries-an-update-on-violence-and-post-traumatic-stress-disorder/) of nine different countries identified various forms of violence common in prostitution. 71% of participants reported being physically assaulted, 63% reported being raped, and 68% met the psychological criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). 89% reported wanting to escape prostitution but did not feel as though this was possible.

A [meta-review of existing studies](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3987574/#:~:text=Lifetime%20prevalence%20of%20any%20or,known%20interpersonal%20and%20individual%20risks.) reports that the lifetime prevalence of “workplace violence” for those involved in prostitution ranged from 45% - 75%, with a range of reported violence of 32% - 55% over the past year.

A [UK study of 62 people](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/138081/1/1_s2.0_S0160791X17302117_main.pdf) who sell sex online via “independent indoor sectors, as independent escorts, webcam workers, providers of sexual massage or BDSM services” found that:

* 65.1% of participants receive persistent or repeated unwanted contact or attempts to contact through email, text or social media.
* 56.2% receive threatening or harassing texts, calls or emails.
* 49.1% experience verbal abuse.
* 29% experience repeated unwanted contact or attempts to contact in person, or persistent following or being watched.

Another [UK study](https://nationaluglymugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sex-Workers-Too_NUM_ECP_UL_VAWG_Consultation_Submitted_19022021.pdf.pagespeed.ce.SXshFrlXBh.pdf) found similar results. Of 79 people involved in the commercial sex industry, they reported violence they experienced included: online harassment: 57%, sexual harassment: 47%, Image-Based Sexual Abuse: 30% and cyberflashing: 29%

[A House of Commons report](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/26/26.pdf) (2016) calculated that an estimated 152 individuals involved in prostitution were murdered in the UK between 1990 – 2015. In research [conducted by National Ugly Mugs](https://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/prostitution/written/29064.pdf) (2015), 49% of UK individuals involved in prostitution said they were concerned for their safety.

**5.**

[Physical violence and psychological trauma are regular occurrences for prostituted people](https://familyfirst.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IS-IT-WORKING-An-Evidenced-Based-Review-of-the-Decriminalisation-of-Prostitution-in-New-Zealand-Report.pdf). This violence and trauma are predominantly [perpetrated by sex buyers, as well as pimps and traffickers](https://sti.bmj.com/content/sextrans/early/2021/10/26/sextrans-2021-055088.full.pdf). Women and girls are forced to endure unwanted sex, inclusive of violent and dehumanizing sex acts [at the hands of sex buyers](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277539516301935?via%3Dihub).

[Sex buyers go to prostituted women](https://journals.whitingbirch.net/index.php/SWSSR/article/view/1190) because they can ask/demand that the women perform sex acts their partners are not willing to do. In [interviews with sex buyers in Scotland,](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232596918_Attitudes_and_Social_Characteristics_of_Men_Who_Buy_Sex_in_Scotland) “most frequently, these sex acts tended to be oral and anal sex. They also sought corporal punishment, sadism and masochism.” Underscoring this reasoning is the belief of sex buyers that once they have paid for a woman, she is under obligation to do whatever he demands, regardless of [how painful or dehumanising](https://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Farleyetal2011ComparingSexBuyers.pdf). They demand a ‘good’ service and view prostitution in terms of a commodity.

The objectification and dehumanization of women and girls involved in the commercial sex industry is evident from examining sex buyer reviews. [An analysis of 148 online reviews](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077801218757375?icid=int.sj-abstract.citing-articles.15), and 2,424 reply posts of legal prostitution “services” in Australia, found that sex buyer admissions of inflicting harm were common and the words and narratives used by sex buyers to describe the women they had bought sex from were objectifying, dehumanizing and violent.

**7.**

People are exploited in a variety of different prostitution settings, including pornography. In 2019, pornography was the third-most [common form of sex trafficking](https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Polaris-2019-US-National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline-Data-Report.pdf) in the US. In 2023, Pornhub’s parent company Aylo [admitted it had profited from sex trafficking](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/crime/pornhub-sex-trafficking-girlsdoporn-b2469901.html). Several other lawsuits are pending with allegations relating to sex trafficking; profiting from child sexual abuse materials; profiting from image-based sexual abuse; and profiting from uploaded videos of sexual assault.

In 2023, [France’s High Council for Equality between Women and Men](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/27/online-pornography-breaks-french-law-equality-watchdog-france#:~:text=As%20much%20as%2090%25%20of,nominated%20equality%20watchdog%20has%20found.) found that “90% of pornographic content online features verbal, physical and sexual violence towards women, and a significant amount of violence shown is punishable under existing laws in France.” In fact, much of what happens to women and girls in pornography would meet the international definition of torture.

[New online forms of prostitution](https://culturereframed.org/onlyfans-and-the-reality-of-online-prostitution/) – like webcamming – can be additionally harmful to women due to their unique risks to privacy. Women who upload videos to these sites may be subject to blackmail, harassment or nonconsensual sharing of images. A significant number of women in prostitution have had their prostitution filmed – [in one study,](https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf) 64% of interviewees had been filmed without their consent during the purchase of sex and many spoke of the fear of not knowing where those videos can be seen. 67% worry about the perpetual nature of pornography, saying “porn is forever.” 38% of the time, someone the interviewees knew had located and viewed their online pornography, and 37% of the time, they faced blackmail from someone who had downloaded their videos.

Pornography consumption is also a driver of the sex trade. As noted above, men who buy sex report seeking out women in prostitution as they can force them to endure harmful, dangerous and violent sex acts. Men who buy sex report higher consumption of pornography. [A study in Scotland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232596918_Attitudes_and_Social_Characteristics_of_Men_Who_Buy_Sex_in_Scotland) found that “those who were most frequent users of pornography were also the most frequent users of women in prostitution.” Research shows that men report first learning about sex from pornography and re-enacting what they see in pornography with their partners and prostituted women.

In their study of British men who reported purchasing sex, [Farley, Bindel, and Golding (2009)](https://i1.cmsfiles.com/eaves/2012/04/MenWhoBuySex-89396b.pdf) found that 58% of participants reported viewing pornographic film/images at least once a month. 51% used Internet pornography at least once a month, with 20% reporting using online pornography at least once a week, at 15% reporting use more than once a week. 60% of these men reported viewing the women in pornography as “prostitutes.”

**9.**

In [Germany](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf) which adopts a legalised but regulated approach to prostitution, women face extreme violence and poverty, the number of brothels, including mega brothels is rising and young migrant women are trafficked into the sex trade to meet the growing male demand for paid sex. [Women do not avail](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf) of employment contracts, pensions or benefits and most of the revenue remains in the hands of pimps, organised crime groups, and traffickers. In 2007, the [German government concluded](https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/fileadmin/user_upload/federal_government_report_of_the_impact_of_the_act_regulating_the_legal_situation_of_prostitutes_2007_en_1.pdf) that legalisation of prostitution had not achieved its goals of improving working conditions for prostituted people, making prostitution safer, or reducing related criminal activities.

In the [Netherlands](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260493897_The_challenges_of_fighting_sex_trafficking_in_the_legalized_prostitution_market_of_the_Netherlands), where prostitution is also legalised but regulated, between 50% and 90% of prostituted people are trafficked, forced or coerced into prostitution. Like Germany, [few women](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf) have availed of any employment contracts or social service benefits and there is a disproportionally high number of migrant women and girls involved in prostitution.

In New Zealand prostitution is fully decriminalized yet, prostituted people still face a wide range of physical and mental health harms [such as](https://familyfirst.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IS-IT-WORKING-An-Evidenced-Based-Review-of-the-Decriminalisation-of-Prostitution-in-New-Zealand-Report.pdf) “coercion into unwanted sex acts, high levels of violence, physical injury, unsafe sex... exploitative practices... depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders [and] dissociative disorders.” [Government reports](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLSocRP12051/prostitution-law-reform-in-new-zealand) consistently found that prostituted persons “were still frequently exploited” through violence and threats of violence, debt bondage, rape, leveraging drug addiction, and the use of fines to coerce service in commercial sex.

[Decriminalisation and legalisation](https://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOSE_10-Reasons-to-Oppose-Full-Decrim_FINAL_web-version_w-citations_2-15-22.pdf) create on-ramps to more sexual exploitation by removing laws targeting sex buyers. Removing these laws normalises male demand for paid sex. Thus, men who were deterred from buying sex by possible criminal penalties are no longer inhibited. As more men buy sex, more people are pulled into and exploited in prostitution. [Analysis of data comparing up to 150 countries](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/45198/1/Neumayer_Legalized_Prostitution_Increase_2012.pdf) found that countries with legalised prostitution have larger international human trafficking inflows.

In contrast, [in countries such as Sweden, France and Ireland,](https://www.ucd.ie/geary/static/serp/Shifting_the_Burden_Report.pdf) where sex buyers are penalised, consumer-level demand is constrained. [This reduces the scale of the sex trade and curtails sex trafficking](https://www.perlego.com/book/921026/the-sex-economy-pdf). Germany has a prostitution rate between 30 and 40 times that of Sweden. New Zealand which has a population of 4.5 million, has between 6000 and 8000 women in prostitution, [which is 12 to 16 times that of the sex trade in Sweden.](https://www.perlego.com/book/921026/the-sex-economy-pdf)A [study](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10657-012-9339-y) comparing the effect of criminalisation of sex buying on the amount of sex bought in Denmark (sex buying is legal), Norway (sex buying criminalized), and Sweden found that 2.6% of Danes had purchased sex in the past six months, compared to 1.7% of Norwegians and 0.5% of Swedes.

**15.**

Prostitution is inherently violent, and it is important to note that this violence cannot be regulated away. However, the Nordic Model of prostitution regulation reduces the scale of the sex industry by decreasing demand and therefore preventing more women and girls from being exploited. Women and girls also have better access to services and pathways out of prostitution. Finally, this model has a [normative effect](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=dignity) on the behaviour of men. A [study](https://i1.cmsfiles.com/eaves/2012/04/MenWhoBuySex-89396b.pdf) of British men who purchased sex found that 77% of participants believed they would be deterred from purchasing sex if a greater criminal penalty were imposed.