**Input for SR VAWG's report on violence against women and prostitution**

**Submission from Christian Action Research and Education (CARE)**

**About CARE**

1. CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) is a well-established mainstream Christian charity providing resources and helping to bring Christian insight and experience to matters of public policy and practical caring initiatives across the UK.
2. We have answered Questions 4, 6, 7, 9, 10-12 and 15.

**Question 4: What forms of violence are prostituted women and girls subjected to (physical, psychological, sexual, economic, administrative, or other)?**

1. In 2023, the EU stated, “*various studies show that women in prostitution face more egregious human rights violations, violence and exploitation than women on average, including high levels of gender-based, psychological, physical and sexual violence*.”[[1]](#footnote-1) [[2]](#footnote-2)
2. Research for the Scottish Government in 2016 found that *“most respondents who provide services and support to those involved in prostitution emphasised a range of risks and adverse impacts associated with prostitution in the short and longer term in relation to general and mental health, safety and wellbeing and sexual heath.”* [[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4)
3. Prostitution is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Any policy which treats prostitution as a legitimate business, effectively frames sexual assault and violence against those in prostitution as work hazards rather than crimes. As one woman from New Zealand said in 2015: *“We, the prostituted could not seek protection from police before decriminalisation because we were considered the criminals ourselves. And we cannot seek protection from police after decriminalisation because the crime has been invisibilised by the enabling of pimps and johns*.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Question 6: Describe the linkages, if any, between prostitution and the violation of the human rights of women and girls.**

1. The evidence of the nature of the harm of prostitution is not in accord with human rights. CARE firmly believes that prostitution should continue to be recognised as incompatible with human dignity. For this reason, the term “sex work” should be avoided as this implies a positive experience masking the exploitation that frequently occurs.

1. Prostitution presents a challenge to achieving gender equality, ending the trafficking of women and eliminating violence against women. CARE notes that the European Parliament has described prostitution as *“being both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, while perpetuating gendered stereotypes and stereotypical thinking about women selling sex, such as the idea that women’s and under-age females’ bodies are for sale to satisfy male demand for sex.”*[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Question 7:** **What links are there between pornography and/or other forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution?**

1. CARE raises the links between **prostitution and human trafficking**.
   1. The European Parliament *Report on Sexual Exploitation and Prostitution and its Impact on Gender Equality* states: *‘Prostitution in the European Union and across the world is directly linked to the trafficking of women and girls. Sixty-two per cent of trafficked females are the victims of sexual exploitation.*’[[7]](#footnote-7)
   2. A report by the Police Foundation identified 65 brothels operating in Bristol, UK, of which 77% displayed links to organised crime and the majority of those involved in providing sexual services were foreign nationals, both indicators of possible trafficking.[[8]](#footnote-8)
   3. The Scottish Government’s 2016 report states that “*there is evidence of links between prostitution and serious organised crime, and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation*”.[[9]](#footnote-9)
   4. The 2018 report from the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and Global Sex Trade found *“Third party exploiters, including traffickers and brothel owners dominate the off-street sex trade”* and “*Britain is currently a highly profitable and low risk destination for sex traffickers*.”[[10]](#footnote-10)
2. Evidence suggests that “*a liberal prostitution policy does not lead to better protection and, in some cases, legalized prostitution can be detrimental to protecting victims of human trafficking*.”[[11]](#footnote-11)
   1. For instance, Dutch academics “*conclude[d] that the legalization and regulation of the prostitution sector has not driven out organized crime. On the contrary, fighting sex trafficking... may even be harder in the legalized prostitution sector*.”[[12]](#footnote-12)
   2. The decriminalisation of prostitution in New Zealand appears not to have led to more human trafficking prosecutions. The 2023 US State Department Report on Trafficking places New Zealand in their Tier 2 category. The report says, “*The government did not report any trafficking prosecutions or convictions for the second consecutive year; however, it prosecuted two cases with trafficking indicators under migrant exploitation laws, pending further investigations for potential trafficking elements. Despite investigating an increased number of cases with trafficking indicators, the government did not identify any certified trafficking victims for the third consecutive year. Officials, including police and customs officials, did not have written [policies] for victim identification or referrals to care, and the government did not refer any victims to services. The government has never identified a certified adult victim of sex trafficking*.”[[13]](#footnote-13)
   3. In 2022, the OCSE has reported that the German legislation potentially undermines efforts to prevent trafficking.[[14]](#footnote-14)
3. Other research suggests clear links between **paying for sex and harmful attitudes towards women**.
   1. International studies indicate that notions of men having a biological imperative or a right to sex as a ‘consumer’ underpin motivations for purchasing sex.[[15]](#footnote-15)
   2. Research with men who buy sex has indicated many demonstrate low levels of empathy for women in prostitution, and often view women in prostitution as fundamentally different from other women.[[16]](#footnote-16)
   3. Other data suggests that these men are more likely to share characteristics with men at risk of committing sexual aggression than men who do not buy sex.[[17]](#footnote-17)
   4. A European Parliament resolution from 2014 describes prostitution as *“a cause and a consequence of gender inequality”*.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Question 9:** **How effective have legislative frameworks and policies been in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in prostitution?**

1. The UK jurisdictions tackle “demand” differently:
   1. In England and Wales, there is a narrow offence framed narrowly around the purchase of sex from individuals who have been coerced, but it has proven difficult to use.[[19]](#footnote-19) In 2023, a Westminster Parliamentary Committee described law enforcement action against those who purchase sexual services as “*woeful”.* There have been few prosecutions and very low penalties, which then leads to few police resources used to prosecute perpetrators undermining the deterrent effect*.*[[20]](#footnote-20)
   2. The 2015 Scottish trafficking law does not include measures to tackle the ‘market’ in which sexual exploitation takes place.[[21]](#footnote-21)
   3. Northern Ireland’s 2015 human trafficking legislation specifically seeks to reduce the market for prostitution by making it a criminal offence to pay for sexual services,[[22]](#footnote-22) but there has only been one conviction since the law was passed.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**Question 10:** **What measures are in place to collect and analyse data at the national level with a view to better understanding the impact that prostitution has on the rights of women and girls**?

1. There are no such proactive data collection systems in the UK.

**Question 11: What measures are in place to assist and support women and girls who wish to leave prostitution?**

1. Academic evidence has shown that a large percentage of women in prostitution would like to exit if they could but they face significant barriers and there are few specialist programmes to help them.[[24]](#footnote-24) The Scottish Government’s 2017 review said,“*there would appear to be considerable scope for improving the opportunities for individuals to exit prostitution should they so wish*.”[[25]](#footnote-25) A 2023 report confirmed the “*significant barriers [to exit]. These include but are not limited to struggles with their mental health as a result of the traumas they have experienced, lack of an alternative income, lack of social connections and trusted persons in their lives, coercion and threats of further harm, lack of a safe place to stay and profound feelings of shame, which can prevent them from seeking support.”*[[26]](#footnote-26)A Westminster Parliamentary Group said *“it is deeply disturbing that women involved in prostitution can access frontline services for many years without ever once being asked whether they have a desire to exit the sex trade.”*[[27]](#footnote-27)
2. The European Parliament and Council of Europe have highlighted the importance of specialist services to help people leave prostitution and recommend development of such services.[[28]](#footnote-28) Individuals should have access to services which can deal with specific needs and support them in leaving prostitution.[[29]](#footnote-29) In 2023/24, the UK Government has provided £180,000 to Trevi Women to provide support to women with complex and multiple needs, including women seeking to exit on-street prostitution in Plymouth, UK.[[30]](#footnote-30)
3. Northern Ireland has a strategy in place to assist those who want to leave prostitution, but it lacks financial resources and is more of a compendium of existing services than any new measures to support women.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**Question 12:** **What are the obstacles faced by organizations and frontline service providers in their mission to support victims and survivors of prostitution?**

1. Vital to the effectiveness of such services is the provision of adequate funding.[[32]](#footnote-32) Whilst this may require initial expenditure, research suggests *“a basic calculation indicates that the potential savings associated with women exiting are significant*”[[33]](#footnote-33) for example in sectors such as health care services, children’s social care, addiction treatment services, and law enforcement.

**Question 15:** **What recommendations do you have to prevent and end violence associated with the prostitution for women and girls?**

1. In the light of the evidence that prostitution is a disproportionately harmful and exploitative phenomenon CARE **believes the best way to protect women from harm and discrimination in prostitution is to reduce demand and help people to leave prostitution**. This should be done through legal measures and by provision of support services.
2. The so-called “Nordic model” where it is a criminal offence to pay for sex, along with provision of support services for those exiting prostitution, was adopted in Sweden in 1999 and in Norway in 2009. Official evaluations in Sweden and Norway, have reported the laws have had a limiting effect on levels of prostitution, reducing numbers of men reporting having paid for sex and creating barriers to human trafficking.[[34]](#footnote-34) [[35]](#footnote-35) [[36]](#footnote-36)
3. Northern Ireland, Canada, France, Iceland, Israel and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) have all adopted the Nordic Model. It has also been endorsed by:
   1. Council of Europe and European Parliament resolutions, including most recently in 2023;[[37]](#footnote-37)
   2. A 2017 assessment of evidence regarding laws on purchasing sex for the Scottish Government concludes: *“Taking limitations of the available evidence into account there does appear to be sufficient evidence to indicate that street prostitution in Sweden has declined following the introduction of legislation, with some evidence to suggest that the number of individuals involved in prostitution overall has also reduced.”*[[38]](#footnote-38) And *“The overall picture appears to be one of continued, but decreased demand for prostitution in countries where the purchase of sex has been criminalised.”*[[39]](#footnote-39)
   3. A 2019 report on Prostitution in the UK by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission;[[40]](#footnote-40)
   4. A 2020 report on the law in the ROI reported that after three years in effect, the results of the law were “*very promising”* [[41]](#footnote-41)
4. **CARE recommends that UN policy should encourage states to proactively offer women the opportunity to exit prostitution and provide them with holistic support to do so.** We recognise that it is not possible to achieve these aims whilst simultaneously legalising or legitimising the business of prostitution, and therefore reject the concept of a sex industry in which paying for, procuring and managing prostitution is legal or decriminalised and instead promote approaches to prostitution which seek to reduce demand.

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2. See also European Parliament Resolution of 26 February 2014 on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality P7\_TA(2014)0162 paragraph 6; Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1983 (2014) Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery in Europe paragraph 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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10. All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, Behind Closed Doors Organised sexual exploitation in England and Wales May 2018 pages 1 and 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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