

UNITED NATIONS WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

“Establishing an international legal framework for the protection of vulnerable women in the sex industry”

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Definitions of Key Concepts

These are some terms that we recommend you understand and research prior to the MUN to have a better understanding of our debate. They may vary depending on your country's ideology.

1. **Sex Work** :The consensual exchange of sexual services between adults for money or goods. Distinct from sexual exploitation, which is understood as coercive or abusive.
2. **Sex Industry**: The economic sector where commercial sexual services are involved, including street-based work, brothels, escort agencies, massage parlours, and online services.
3. **Decriminalisation**: Legal model which decriminalizes consensual adult sex work. Sex workers and clients are not criminalized, and occupational conditions can be subject to regulations like other forms of labor.
4. **Legalisation**: Sex work is legal but regulated through particular licensing or registration regimes. Those who fall outside the approved mechanisms can be subject to sanctions.
5. **Criminalisation**: Criminal law prohibits the sale, purchase, or organisation of sex work; this may take the form of penalising sex workers, clients, or third parties.
6. **Nordic (Equality) Model**: A legal approach where the purchase of sex is criminalised but selling sex is not. It seeks to reduce demand and tackle what is perceived as a gender inequality.
7. **Trafficking in Persons** : Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Defined in the UN Palermo Protocol of 2000

8. **Exploitation:** The act of taking unfair or abusive advantage of a person, especially through coercion, manipulation, or power imbalances-economic, migration-based, social or physical.
9. **Coercion:** Forcing a person to enter into prostitution or specific acts by threats, beatings, deception, debt bondage, or confinement to a home.
10. **Migrant Sex Workers:** Sex workers who cross borders either voluntarily or forcibly. They face additional vulnerability due to immigration laws, lack of legal status, language barriers, and limited access to services.
11. **Vulnerability:** A situation whereby somebody is unable, because of one or a number of vulnerabilities linked to poverty, gender conditions, childhood trauma, migration status, homelessness, or lack of legal identity, among others, to protect their rights and safety.
12. **Occupational Health and Safety (OHS):** The set of laws, policies, and workplace protections intended to protect safe and healthy working conditions. When applied to sex work, it may include access to health clinics, safety protocols, and legal recourse.
13. **Harm Reduction:** Policies that aim to decrease negative consequences of sex work, such as violence and health risks, without necessarily requiring individuals to exit the industry. It may also include availability of condoms, testing for STIs, counselling, police protection, and rights-based services.
14. **Agency:** The ability of an individual to make free and informed choices. Within the context of the sex industry, it refers to the extent of control a sex worker has over clients, working conditions, and participation in the industry.
15. **Survival Sex:** Trading sex to meet a basic need like food, shelter, or safety. Usually associated with homelessness, poverty, or running away from unsafe homes.

16. **Human Rights-Based Approach:** A legal and policy framework that views them as rights-bearing individuals entitled to protection under the law, bodily integrity, non-discrimination, and equal participation in society.
17. **Consent:** Voluntary and informed agreement to engage in sexual activity. In law, lack of consent is crucial in differentiating sex work from exploitation or trafficking.
18. **Stigma:** Social judgment or discrimination against sex workers, rooted in moral, cultural, or religious condemnation of prostitution. Stigma can impede rights and access to health, justice, employment, and social participation.
19. **Structural Violence:** Structural violence refers to systematic harm caused by social structures such as criminalisation, poverty, sexism, xenophobia or racism that limit people's access to rights, services or safety.
20. **Regulatory Framework:** The set of laws, policies, and enforcement mechanisms which surround sex work; these might include licensing requirements, zoning laws, labour rights, inspections, and support systems.

Background Information

There are different levels of protection depending on the country's system around the world. Women involved in the sex industry are considered vulnerable because of the influence of factors like poverty, migration status, limited education, lack of employment opportunities, or previous experiences of abuse. This promotes women to face higher risks of coercion, trafficking, violence, and exploitation, especially in countries where there is a lack of regulation or prostitution is criminalized. There have been various reports from UN agencies that report that criminal groups often target women from marginalized communities, making trafficking easier and more reachable. Women in the sex industry do not have access to essential labor rights, safe working condition, health services, or legal protections, increasing their exposure to harm in many countries. CEDAW is an example of an international agreement of the Palermo Protocol, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it addresses related issues like women's rights and trafficking, but they don't provide specific global framework to protect women in this industry. There are inconsistent national policies and weak cross-border cooperation for preventing trafficking and supporting victims, and a lack of international legal framework. Deportation, arrest, fear and retaliation prevent many women from reporting violence or seeking help from authorities. Experts highlight that an international framework must both prevent exploitations and uphold women's dignity, autonomy, and human rights. women's rights and trafficking

Case Study

New Zealand's passage of the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) in 2003 represents one of the best-documented national efforts to date to enhance the health, safety, and legal protection of women engaging in commercial sex. The PRA decriminalized consensual adult sex work, replacing criminal penalties with a regulatory system aimed at protecting worker welfare, occupational safety, and public health. Its provisions included making it possible for sex workers to operate in safer conditions, preventing the exploitation of minors and vulnerable persons, and fostering transparent and enforceable labor standards. Because the law mandated statutory review, New Zealand offers uncommon real-world evidence of the actual effects of decriminalization, making the country a particularly useful case study in crafting an international legal regime for protecting vulnerable women in the sex trade.

A consistent finding throughout is that decriminalization measurably improved workplace rights and safety for sex workers. Many women recorded greater ability to refuse clients without fear of any form of legal or financial retaliation, something that was much more difficult previously under criminalization. Sex workers also noted improved access to police protection and complaint mechanisms because engagement no longer came with a risk of arrest. Health agencies similarly recorded that the change in legislation aided outreach and service provision and, by consequence, better access to sexual healthcare, counseling and harm-reduction programming. From the perspective of public health, the reform was conducive to health outcomes, supporting evidence that criminalization promotes underground working among sex workers, thus weakening state capacity to provide protection and services.

However, the evidence also shows that legal reform alone cannot eradicate all forms of vulnerability. Most workers benefited from gains in conditions, yet migrants and coerced or trafficked persons continued to face risks that require separate and targeted protective policies. The statutory review considered that decriminalization requires the coexistence of strong anti-trafficking enforcement, immigration protections and labour inspection systems to prevent exploitation in less visible parts of the industry. This is particularly significant for international policy design: decriminalization removes legal barriers to rights and services, but structural vulnerabilities arising from poverty, migration status, coercion or organised exploitation persist and need to be addressed through complementary mechanisms.

Despite the political concerns raised before 2003, available data did not show a large and direct increase in the number of sex workers attributable to decriminalisation. Instead, the industry has remained relatively stable since then, suggesting that legal status does not automatically expand

market size but does shape the conditions under which workers operate. The New Zealand model also introduced a formal review mechanism, requiring evidence-based monitoring and reporting to Parliament. This is a useful governance practice for an international framework: evaluation should not be a one-off political debate but an ongoing requirement, ensuring that legal systems adapt to new patterns of harm, migration flows and criminal activity. Several policy principles emerge from the New Zealand experience that can inform an international legal framework for protecting vulnerable women in the sex industry.

Past U.N. Action

The United Nations has so far addressed issues related to the protection of women in the sex industry mainly through documents on trafficking, gender-based violence, and the rights of women. The CEDAW, 1979, binds states to protect women from exploitation and assures them equal access to justice, safety, and support services. The General Assembly adopted the Palermo Protocol in 2000 to prevent trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, and to step up international cooperation for dismantling trafficking networks. General Assembly Resolution 48/104 of 1993, on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, recognized that women in prostitution are particularly vulnerable to violence and called for states to implement laws prohibiting exploitation. There are a few reports that UN Women, the Human Rights Council, and UNODC have time and again raised concerns about violence, trafficking risks, and lack of protection for women in the sex industry. Many UN bodies have advocated for victim-centered approaches, including access to shelters for exploited women, legal aid, and medical assistance. Despite all this, the UN has not yet designed a specific, unified international legal framework pertaining exclusively to protecting the vulnerable women in the sex industry, and that leaves a huge gap in protection at the global level.

Blocks

Your country should align itself with the bloc that reflects its national capacity to regulate AI-generated sexual content, choosing between high, medium, or low protection levels.

1. HIGH FLEXIBILITY COUNTRIES

Most open to international frameworks; sex work is legalized, decriminalized, or strongly regulated.

1. Argentina
2. Australia
3. Netherlands
4. New Zealand
5. Germany

2. MEDIUM FLEXIBILITY COUNTRIES

Mixed systems, Nordic models, or partial criminalization. Support protection but disagree on how.

1. France
2. Norway
3. Sweden
4. Canada
5. United Kingdom
6. Brazil
7. Mexico
8. South Africa
9. Philippines
10. Thailand

3. LOW FLEXIBILITY COUNTRIES

Full criminalization or very restrictive laws; least open to international legalization frameworks.

1. Afghanistan
2. China

3. India
4. Kenya
5. Pakistan
6. Russian Federation
7. United Arab Emirates
8. United States
9. Japan

Possible Moderated Caucuses

During moderated caucuses, your aim should be to propose topics that your delegation believes are important to discuss. These caucuses could be focused on the entire topic, which would make the debate more general, or they could be focused on a specific topic instead (e.g. personal freedoms).

Remember that during the moderated caucus as well as in consultations of the whole, delegations are guiding the debate and choosing what should be discussed, so your aim as a delegation should be to propose topics, as well as participate in any debate in order to express your country's opinion, and make your voice heard.

Furthermore, remember that if you have planned any topic for a moderated caucus or a consultation of the whole, you should also think about the speaker's time, as well as the duration of the motion.

Some examples of topics that could be discussed are the following (the following topics can be used):

1. Comparing Legal Approaches to Sex Work:

- Evaluating decriminalization vs. legalization vs. criminalization
- The Nordic/Equality model and its impact on women's safety
- Lessons learned from national case studies (e.g., New Zealand, Sweden, Netherlands).

2. Protecting the Human Rights and Legal Status of Sex Workers

- Recognition of sex work as labor under international law
- Strategies to eliminate institutional discrimination and police abuse
- Ensuring equal access to legal protection, contracts, and reporting mechanisms

3. Anti-Trafficking and Distinguishing Exploitation from Consensual Sex Work

- Strengthening cross-border cooperation and information-sharing
- Identifying early warning indicators and reporting systems
- Creating safe procedures for victims to seek support without prosecution

4. Safeguarding Migrant Women in the Sex Industry

- Immigration policies that increase or reduce vulnerability
- Temporary residence permits for those reporting exploitation
- Ensuring access to translation, legal aid, and labor rights

5. Public Health and Harm Reduction Measures

- Access to STI/HIV prevention, testing, and treatment
- Mental health services and trauma-informed care
- Overcoming stigma that prevents sex workers from seeking healthcare

6. Socio-Economic Supports for Women in the Sex Industry

- Exit programs: vocational training, housing, income support
- Addressing poverty, inequality, and gender-based economic exclusion
- Community-based partnerships with NGOs and women-led organizations.

7. Regulation, Monitoring, and Data Collection

- Establishing national oversight bodies and periodic legal reviews
 - Collecting reliable data while protecting privacy and anonymity
 - Sharing best practices among UN member states and regional blocs
- Personal Freedoms

Possible Resolution Points

When writing resolutions your aim should be to reflect the position of your bloc, through the clauses written, for the preambular clauses, your aim should be to describe the position of your bloc on the subject, if your bloc's stance is in favor of preserving freedoms, then the preambular clauses should reflect that. However the Operative Clauses have to be focused on the specific measures your bloc believes that should be implemented.

Below, you will find some examples of operative clauses for your resolutions, do not copy the clauses used as examples literally, however clauses with similar language can be used:

International Legal Standards & Frameworks:

- 1) Calls for the establishment of a *comprehensive international convention* specifically addressing the rights, safety, and legal protections of vulnerable women in the sex industry, whether voluntarily or through coercion.
- 2) Encourages Member States to harmonize national laws with international standards to ensure consistency in the protection of women in the sex industry.
- 3) Recommends the creation of an *International Monitoring Body* under UN Women or the OHCHR to assess State compliance, collect data, and publish annual reports.
- 4) Supports the adoption of a global definition distinguishing *voluntary sex work*, *survival sex*, and *sex trafficking*, in order to enable accurate legal protections.

Protection, Safety & Legal Rights:

- 1) Urges Member States to guarantee safe working conditions for women in the sex industry, including access to healthcare, security services, emergency hotlines, and legal aid.
- 2) Calls upon States to implement *non-punitive legal systems* that avoid criminalizing women in prostitution, focusing instead on protection and harm reduction.
- 3) Requests that States ensure that any law-enforcement interaction with women in the sex industry upholds human rights standards and prohibits harassment, extortion, or arbitrary detention.
- 4) Encourages the development of *anonymous reporting mechanisms* to report abuse, trafficking, exploitation, and workplace violence without risk of incrimination.

Anti-Trafficking & Exploitation Measures

- 1) Strengthens international collaboration for the prevention of human trafficking through improved border controls, intelligence sharing, and unified prosecution frameworks.
- 2) Invites Member States to provide *immediate protective status* (temporary visas, shelters, psychological support) for migrant women exploited in the sex trade.
- 3) Recommends mandatory national investigations into organized crime networks exploiting women in the sex industry.

Emphasizes victim-centered approaches that prioritize rehabilitation and reintegration over prosecution of trafficking.

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