



URGENT: VOTE TO REJECT THE “SEX WORK” REPORT

Open letter from 13 umbrella organisations
representing more than 2,000 feminist, survivor-led and grassroots NGOs
to Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

We, the undersigned, representing 2,000 feminist, grassroots and survivor-led NGOs, call on the Members of the PACE to **reject and vote against the report** “Protecting the human rights and improving the lives of sex workers and victims of sexual exploitation”.

Our organisations have decades of grassroots experience in addressing issues related to violence against women, human rights, migrant rights, prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation among others. Our expertise allows us to conclude that **prostitution is a violence** targeting the most vulnerable and that its **legalisation** (or “full decriminalisation” as quoted in the report) poses a real threat to the lives of women in prostitution and women’s rights globally.

Our 13 umbrella organisations collectively advocate for the **Equality Model** on prostitution, one that decriminalises all persons in prostitution, provides exit pathways and alternatives to them and penalise the perpetrators: pimps and buyers of sexual acts. This model - existing among others in Sweden and France - has proven to be efficient in protecting persons in prostitution while fighting trafficking for sexual exploitation and was [recently praised by the European Court of Human Rights](#).

We wish to express our **extreme concerns on the report named “Protecting the human rights and improving the lives of sex workers and victims of sexual exploitation”** which is based on a biased, opaque consultation process with organisations promoting an approach aimed at legalising all aspects of the prostitution system including pimping and the purchase of sexual acts. The procedure excluded the voices of survivors of prostitution and of grassroots and feminist organisations.

We consider that the report which will be voted on September 12th is harmful for persons in prostitution and women’s rights for several reasons:

- ♦ **The report promotes the “Belgian model” which recently went further into the decriminalisation of pimping** in its criminal code leading to disastrous consequences for persons in prostitution, and which was denounced by grassroots NGOs on the ground

repeatedly¹. The depenalisation of pimping allows pimps to hide behind legal facades to exploit prostituted persons in total impunity. Europol addresses that where prostitution is legal, trafficking for sexual exploitation increases². In Germany, which legalised prostitution in 2002, 82% of persons registered in prostitution are foreigners³. Former commissioner Manfred Paulus in charge of fighting trafficking in human beings in Ulm, underlines that

"Thanks to liberal, favourable policies towards traffickers, the red-lights districts in Germany are and have been under the control of criminal networks for years. These include albanic clans, the russian mafia (...) and the Hells Angels"⁴.

- ◆ **The report fails to acknowledge that male demand for the purchase of sexual acts is the rootcause of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.** Where prostitution has been legalised/"fully decriminalised", the male demand for the purchase of sexual acts has exploded. Germany, the Netherlands and Spain have become hotspots for sex tourism and human trafficking. Germany is now referred to as "The Brothel of Europe"⁵, with 1 million men going to a brothel every day⁶. In Spain, it has become normalised for young people to go to a brothel as a birthday celebration⁷, and 39%⁸ of men acknowledge having paid for sexual acts at least once. In the Netherlands, it is now legal for a driving instructor to request a sexual act as a means of payment from his students⁹.
- ◆ **The use of the terminology "sex work" goes against UN and European agreed language which uses the neutral term "prostitution".** The International human rights law (UN 1949 Convention¹⁰) recognises prostitution as a "violation of the dignity of the human person". It is thus extremely difficult to understand how a violation of human dignity could be recognised as work by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.
- ◆ The report does not uphold the highest standards of protection of International and European human rights on prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation:
 - The **UN 1949 Convention**, a universal binding treaty, addresses that prostitution is incompatible with human dignity. It calls on Members in its Article 1 & 2 to penalise pimping in all of its forms including brothel owning, and profiting from the prostitution of others even with the consent of that person¹¹.
 - The UN **Palermo Protocol**¹² calls on States to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation.

1. [Prostitution : les associations féministes expriment leur profonde inquiétude quant à l'approche de la Belgique](#)

2. [Regulation of prostitution in the EU: its cross-border implications and impact on gender equality and women's rights](#)

3. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2024/07/PD24_271_228.html

4. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9A48cAUomNTZ1B0VGJRcERVbkU/edit?resourcekey=0-Vq9KWJwDo0AfEW348LZnoA>

5. [Mega-brothels: Has Germany become 'bordello of Europe'? BBC, 2014](#)

6. [Germany Has Become the Cut-Rate Prostitution Capital of the World | TIME.com](#)

7. [Crece el consumo de prostitución entre los más jóvenes, El Diario Solidario, 2019](#)

8. https://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/2780_2799/2780/Cru278000EDAD_H.html

9. [Dutch driving instructors can trade lessons for sex | CNN](#)

10. [Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others](#)

11. [Art1 & 2. Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others](#)

12. [Art. 9 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children](#)

- The **CEDAW**¹³ in its Article 6 calls on States to suppress the exploitation of prostitution of women.
- The **European Parliament** recognises that prostitution is a “*violation of human dignity*” and “*an obstacle to equality between women & men, contrary to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU*”¹⁴. In 2023, it reaffirmed that prostitution was a violence and called on Member States to depenalise persons in prostitution, provide exit pathways to them, penalise the purchase of sexual acts and pimps in line with the Equality Model¹⁵.
- The **UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women** addresses that the “*legalization of prostitution increases the demand, fosters violence against women and girls and weakens the tools required for law enforcement to monitor, target and prosecute perpetrators, including traffickers and other third-party exploiters.*” The rapporteur calls on Member States to adopt the five pillars of the Equality model.
- ◆ **The report makes unsubstantiated claims about so-called negative effects of the Equality Model which the European Court of Human Rights itself refutes in the judgment M.A vs France from July 2024**¹⁶. The Court addresses that there is **no evidence that the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual acts has produced negative effects towards persons in prostitution** (§155), that these effects might as well be attributed to the prostitution system itself. It further highlights that the Equality Model law is a coherent global approach which:
 - reversed the balance of power between persons in prostitution and buyers of sexual acts in favour of prostituted persons (§163);
 - protects persons in prostitution, safeguards human dignity, fights trafficking (§141).

It therefore upholds its conventionality.

In view of these elements, we, 13 umbrella organisations representing more than 2,000 grassroots NGOs, survivor-led organisations and feminist organisations worldwide, reaffirm that a Europe where the most vulnerable women and girls are not commodified, bought and sold in the sexist, racist and class-based prostitution system is possible.

We urge you to reject and vote against the harmful report on “Protecting the human rights and improving the lives of sex workers and victims of sexual exploitation”.

13. [Art. 6 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\), 18 December 1979](#)

14. [European Parliament resolution of 26 February 2014 on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality](#)

15. [Regulation of prostitution in the EU: its cross-border implications and impact on gender equality and women’s rights](#)

16. [CEDH, Affaire M.A et autres contre France, 25/07/2024](#)

SIGNATORIES:

Brussels Call

Bundesverband Nordisches Modell (BVNM)

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW)

Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International)

Coordination Française pour le Lobby Européen des Femmes (CLEF)

Equality Now

Euromed Feminist Initiative (EFI)

European Network of Migrant Women (ENOMW)

European Women's Lobby (EWL)

Federación Estatal de Mujeres Abolicionistas (FEMAB)

Rights4Girls (R4G)

Swedish Women's Lobby (SWL)

Survivors of Prostitution Abuse Calling for Enlightenment (SPACE International)