

# Unison Delegate Conference 2018: Vote AGAINST Motion 127 “Decriminalisation for Safety”



*Motion 127 “Decriminalisation for safety”, brought by Lambeth to the Unison Delegate Conference 2018, seeks to overturn Unison’s longstanding support for the Nordic Model approach to prostitution and replace it with support for full decriminalisation of the sex trade, including profiteers (pimps, brothel keepers, and procurers) and punters (sex buyers), on the basis that this is safer for “sex workers.”*

*In this article, we go through the motion line by line, showing that it relies on partial facts, poor-quality research, and distortion of the bigger picture. We hope that this will help delegates and Unison members understand what is at stake and why we recommend you vote **against** the motion.*

## Motion 127 unpicked

(The motion text is in bold and our response in normal type.)

**‘Conference notes that UNISON’s current policy on sex work, adopted in 2010 on the basis of a motion from women’s conference, is to support proposals which decriminalise the selling of sex acts while introducing a ‘sex buyers’ law’ criminalising those who purchase sex acts.’**

This is a misleading description of the current policy, the full text of which is available in the [Unison motions database](#).<sup>1</sup>

The policy starts with the recognition that the UK’s current legislation enshrines men’s right to buy women for sex and is directly contradictory to a society based on equality between the sexes.

It continues with a recognition of the violence and abuse that is inherent in prostitution and the damage it causes to those in it, and how most women who become involved in prostitution do so as a result of childhood abuse, poverty, drug dependency, and homelessness, and commonly before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. It recognises that those selling sex should be decriminalised and provided with support services to help them exit prostitution

safely and effectively; and that it is only through challenging men's demand for prostitution and changing attitudes will we end the sexual exploitation, violence, and abuse that is intrinsic to prostitution.

It is in recognition of all these facts that the policy calls for a Nordic Model approach to prostitution, which decriminalises the selling of sex and provides support for those in prostitution to build a new life outside, while criminalising profiteers and the purchase of sex, in order to reduce the demand that drives sex trafficking and to change social attitudes.

**‘Conference recognises that the great majority of sex workers are women. Conference also recognises that a significant number of women sex workers identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/ or transgender (LGBT). There are also many gay, bisexual, and trans sex workers who do not identify as women. Sex work is an issue for the LGBT community.’**

Conference should also recognise that:

- The vast majority (99% or more) of punters are male. It is not possible to understand prostitution without recognising that it is something that men do mainly to women and children, but also to some men and transgendered people.
- The vast majority of those who are prostituted are young, poor, recent migrants, victims of earlier sexual abuse, LGBT youth and/ or those who are out of all other options.
- Prostitution is not a relationship between people who have similar levels of social, economic, and cultural power.

**‘Conference notes that national LGBT conference takes a different view to that of women's conference, having adopted motions at several conferences which:**

**a) Recognise that the criminalisation of any kind, including of buyers, increases the risks for sex workers and hinders the global fight against HIV and AIDS’**

We agree that the criminalisation of prostituted persons hinders the fight against HIV and AIDS. However, the assertion that criminalising punters and profiteers under the Nordic Model also hinders that fight is based on flawed modelling and studies in environments in which all of the actors were criminalised and **not** where the Nordic Model has been implemented.

The Nordic Model decriminalises prostituted individuals and provides services to help them exit, along with access to sexual health care and condoms. The Nordic Model therefore has a very different impact than countries where selling sex is criminalised and the women are targeted by the police. In addition, the woman typically has more bargaining power under the Nordic Model, making the use of condoms more likely and violence less likely.

For more on this, see [MYTH: The Nordic Model hinders the global fight against HIV](#).<sup>2</sup>

**‘b) Oppose the introduction of a sex buyers' law;’**

This opposition can only be based on a misunderstanding or denial of the facts.

**‘c) Reflect the view that sex workers are workers, who should have the same rights and protections as workers in other industries;’**

There are many reasons why recognising prostitution as work like any other is regressive and poses serious implications for all workers and the trade union movement.

*Health & Safety (H&S)*



In any other occupation with a risk of exposure to body fluids, you have to wear masks, gloves, goggles, and protective clothing, like the dentist in the picture.

Condoms slip and break, punters can refuse to wear them anyway, and they don't protect from saliva, sweat, and other body fluids. Or from injuries and inflammation caused by friction and mechanical trauma. Or from the psychological damage or deliberate physical violence.

Health & Safety standards require employers to rethink working practices to eliminate unreasonable risk. In prostitution, this would require participants to wear full protective clothing and the prohibition of any intimate contact – which would, of course, change the nature of prostitution itself.

Recognising prostitution as work would require us to accept that normal H&S standards do not apply to it. This would set a terrible precedent that the trade union movement should vehemently resist.

*Decent work*

The United Nations has a concept of [decent work](#),<sup>3</sup> which is defined as:

*“Productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Decent work involves opportunities for productive work, delivers a fair income, guarantees equal opportunities and equal treatment for all, provides security in the workplace and protection for workers and their families, offers better prospects for personal development and social inclusion, and gives people the freedom to express their concerns, to organize and to participate in decisions that affect their lives.”*

The concept of decent work has been included in major human rights declarations, including Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Before we consider whether prostitution can fit the UN definition of decent work, we need to remember exactly what it is. Andrea Dworkin, who was herself in prostitution in her youth, [describes](#)<sup>4</sup> it like this:

*“Prostitution is not an idea. It is the mouth, the vagina, the rectum, penetrated usually by a penis, sometimes hands, sometimes objects, by one man and then another and then another and then another and then another. That’s what it is.”*

This is not work and it certainly is not productive. Its conditions do not include freedom and human dignity or any of the other requirements of decent work.

For the trade union movement to accept prostitution as work would be a terrible capitulation and would stand in opposition to all that it has traditionally fought for. And, again, it would set a terrible precedent.

For an in-depth discussion of these and other serious implications of recognising prostitution as work, see [Why Sex Work Isn’t Work](#).<sup>5</sup>

**‘d) Recognise the strong links internationally, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, between LGBT organising, sex worker organising, the fight against HIV, and improving health and social justice for people living with HIV and (for) LGBT people.’**

We recognise that there have been links between these traditionally marginalised groups. However, it is wrong to conflate the battles of these different groups.

Prostitution cannot be understood as sexual orientation, identity, or contagious illness. It is part of a hugely exploitative system that disproportionately benefits men at the expense of women and girls, and marginalised boys, young men, and LGBT people. It generates vast profits for third parties. According to [Havocscope](#),<sup>6</sup> which provides information about the global black market, prostitution generates **\$1 Billion** a year in the UK and **\$186 Billion** globally. It is capitalism at its most ruthless and predatory.

Most of that money does not end up in the pockets of the vulnerable women and girls, boys and young men, and LGBT people who are rented out for sexual use. They are the commodity that’s being sold. It is other people who are getting rich and powerful off the back of their suffering, and who have a vested interest in maintaining and expanding their cash cow.

Decriminalising the sex trade would inevitably send out the message that there’s nothing wrong with this; that it’s OK to pay to rent (mostly young) people for sexual use and personal gratification. And the corollary would be that we should expect our young people to have to endure being sexually penetrated and used by men they don’t fancy for their living, and that it’s acceptable for third parties to profit from that and to build commercial enterprises around it.

This is not compatible with the values of the trade union movement.

So while we support LGBT people in their fight for personal liberation and we support those whose lives have been affected by HIV and AIDS, we do not support the so-called right of men to rent human beings for sexual use.

**‘Conference further notes there have been significant developments since 2010 including:**

**1) The World Health Organisation 2014 guidelines for helping to prevent the spread of HIV in the most-at-risk populations, including sex workers (the majority of who are women), transgender people, and men who have sex with men, recommended that countries decriminalise sex work, same sex behaviours, and non-conforming gender identities;’**

As mentioned earlier, the assertion that full decriminalisation of the sex trade is the best way to prevent the spread of HIV is based on flawed modelling and conflating the Nordic Model with prohibition regimes where all of the actors (prostituted persons, punters, and profiteers) are criminalised.

Furthermore, the WHO guidelines were developed by an advisory group that was co-chaired by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) under the leadership of Alejandra Gil, a pimp, who has since been jailed for 15 years for sex trafficking.

Feminist author and activist Kat Banyard has rightly described this as a human rights scandal. This alone should cause us to have a healthy critical attitude to the WHO guidelines as they relate to the sex trade.

For more on this, see [MYTH: The Nordic Model hinders the global fight against HIV.](#)<sup>7</sup>

**‘2) Amnesty International’s publication in May 2016 of its “Policy on state obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of sex workers”, which includes advocating for the decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual adult sex work, alongside detailed research reports on these issues in Argentina, Hong Kong, Norway, and Papua New Guinea. The Amnesty policy states that it “has been developed in recognition of the high rates of human rights abuses experienced globally by individuals who engage in sex work, a term that Amnesty only uses in regard to consensual exchanges between adults”;’**

Amnesty’s policy is riddled with logical inconsistencies, omission of key information, and flawed reasoning. Perhaps this is not surprising given that, like the WHO, Amnesty was [advised by pimps.](#)<sup>8</sup>

The policy calls for the tackling of gender inequality and the objectification of women but ignores how prostitution is a key mechanism by which gender inequality is maintained and through which women are objectified.

Amnesty’s definition of “sex work” fails to reflect the material reality of the vast majority of women and girls in prostitution, nor the imbalance of power that **always** exists between the punter and the prostituted individual, and that consent in such circumstances is an oxymoron.

Amnesty’s policy insists that “sex work” and trafficking should not be conflated, but it redefines the UN definition of [trafficking](#)<sup>9</sup> to omit its most relevant purpose: the exploitation of the prostitution of others. Exploiting the prostitution of another human being is the essence of pimping. And most pimping also satisfies the other elements of trafficking.

The [majority](#)<sup>10</sup> of women and children in prostitution worldwide have a pimp and as Sigma Huda, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking 2004–2008, rightly said: “Prostitution as actually practiced in the world usually does satisfy the elements of trafficking.”

What then is the meaning of Amnesty’s instruction to not conflate “sex work” and trafficking? And how does Amnesty expect them to be separated in practice? And how does Amnesty justify redefining pimps as “organisers” of prostitution and calling for their decriminalisation, when most fit the international legal definition of human traffickers and pimping is prohibited by [CEDAW](#)<sup>11</sup> (another binding UN treaty)?

Perhaps the most bizarre fact is that Amnesty did not conduct research in **any** of the countries – such as New Zealand and Germany – that have implemented legislation consistent with its recommendations. If it had conducted such research, Amnesty would know that the approach it recommends invariably leads to an unmitigated [human rights disaster](#).<sup>12</sup>

For more information, see [Response to Amnesty’s Prostitution Policy](#).<sup>13</sup>

**‘3) The Amnesty research report on Norway provided substantial evidence that the ‘sex buyer law’ does not decriminalise sellers, as is often claimed, and details the extensive harm caused to women selling sex by the implementation of the law including forced evictions, deportations and denial of medical care, with Nigerian women particularly targeted;’**

Amnesty’s research in Norway falls far short of research norms and good practice, was deeply flawed, and relied both on a discredited research paper and research performed before the introduction of the Nordic Model in Norway. Moreover, it misinterpreted international human rights law and omitted testimony and interview responses that were supportive of the law. Therefore, no general conclusions about the effectiveness of the Nordic Model can reasonably be inferred from this research.

For an analysis of Amnesty’ research in Norway, see: [MYTH: Amnesty’s research in Norway has proved the Nordic Model is harmful to “sex workers”](#)<sup>14</sup>

**‘4) The call for full decriminalisation of consensual adult sex work is also supported by many other organisations including UNAIDS, the World Health Organisation, the Global Alliance Against Traffick in Women, Anti Slavery International, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, and Human Rights Watch, and by sex workers organisations.’**

All of the organisations that are named here promote the full decriminalisation of the entire sex trade, including of profiteers and punters. As we have [explained](#),<sup>15</sup> UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation (WHO) were advised by a pimp who has now been jailed for 15 years for sex trafficking.

Many high profile lobbyists for “sex worker organisations” claim to be “sex workers” but are in fact pimps and/or brothel keepers. For example, here is a list of some of them, [documented](#)<sup>16</sup> by Melissa Farley:

1. **Norma Jean Almodovar**, executive director of COYOTE (a US “sex workers’ rights organisation”), was convicted of pandering.
2. **Margo St James**, another leader of COYOTE, was arrested for running a brothel.
3. **Terri Jean Bedford**, prominent Canadian “sex worker” advocate, was convicted of running a brothel.
4. **Claudia Brizuela**, a former leader of Asociacion de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina (AMMAR) and a founder of the Latin American-Caribbean Female Sex Workers Network, was arrested and charged with sex trafficking in 2014.
5. **Maxine Doogan** of the US Erotic Service Providers Union was charged with running an escort agency.
6. **Robyn Few**, of the US Sex Workers Outreach Project, was convicted of conspiracy to promote interstate prostitution.
7. **Douglas Fox**, of the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW), was arrested for living off the earnings of prostitution. He proposed the motion at the Amnesty UK AGM in 2008 that eventually led to its full decriminalisation policy.
8. **Alejandra Gil**, a Mexican pimp, former Vice President of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) and leader of the Latin American-Caribbean Female Sex Workers Network, is now serving 15 years in prison for sex trafficking. She advised UNAIDS, WHO, and Amnesty International on their prostitution policies.
9. **Pye Jakobsson**, founder of the Swedish Rose Alliance organisation (which is a member of NSWP) was a long-term Board member of a Stockholm strip club where she was part of the management team.
10. **Jackie McMillan** of the Australian “Sex Workers Outreach Project” was a pornography producer, dungeon club manager, and promoter.
11. **Maggie McNeill** of the US “Sex Workers Outreach Project” was the owner of a New Orleans escort agency.
12. **Tanja Sommer** has a leading position with the German Berufsverband erotische und sexuelle Dienstleistungen (BesD), manages a dominatrix sex studio, and rents out rooms to others in prostitution.
13. **Holger Rettig** is leader of the UEGD (Unternehmerverband Erotikgewerbe Deutschland – Business Association of Erotic Business in Germany), which is an organization of brothel-owning pimps that helped to found BesD.

All of these people have a powerful vested interest in a thriving sex industry. There are likely to be many others that have not been caught. Their promotion of the full decriminalisation of the sex trade is like tobacco industry moguls advising on smoking policy. The vast sums of money that stand to be made from full decriminalisation means there are many powerful vested interests and, just like the tobacco industry lobbyists, they are masters of obfuscation, manipulation, and euphemism. We therefore need to exercise caution when assessing their contributions to the debate.

The truth is that many (perhaps most) women in prostitution do not want to see the sex trade, and certainly not pimps, decriminalised. They know they want to be decriminalised

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themselves and if they are presented with a choice between “decriminalisation” and “criminalisation,” of course they opt for the former. But often they don’t know there’s an alternative, or they’ve been frightened by scare stories about women getting evicted under the Nordic Model. When they come to learn or understand that they would be decriminalised and get help to exit under the Nordic Model, while only the exploiters would be targeted, they often support it.

We are in touch with many women who have current or recent experience in prostitution who support the Nordic Model. Here is a message one of them sent us on social media:

*“I have experience within the sex industry – both ‘choice’ and forced. There are many of us. I have friends I used to ‘work’ with on the streets and in brothels who are still stuck and none of them want full decriminalisation. It would mean the end of exit opportunities.”*

There are many reasons why many of those in prostitution or who have recently exited it cannot easily speak freely in public. But even so, there are many survivors who openly campaign for the Nordic Model. In addition, there are many highly respected [organisations](#) <sup>17</sup> that vehemently oppose the full decriminalisation of the sex trade and instead advocate for the Nordic Model.

**5) The recommendations in the July 2016 House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee interim report on its Inquiry into Prostitution that the criminalisation of sex workers in England and Wales should end, and that the government should immediately change existing legislation so that soliciting is no longer an offence and amend the laws on ‘brothel keeping’ so as to allow sex workers to share premises rather than risk working alone.’**

We are fully in favour of the decriminalisation of soliciting to sell sex. However, we do not support the suggested changes in the laws on brothel keeping because there are many factors that need to be considered and balanced properly, as we explain in [The problem with “safety in numbers.”](#)<sup>18</sup>

The 2016 Home Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into prostitution was chaired by Keith Vaz, who was [exposed](#) <sup>19</sup> as a punter shortly after the interim report was published. This did not surprise us because the report was extremely [biased](#).<sup>20</sup> One of the stated aims of the inquiry was to look into whether buying sex should be criminalised. Vaz therefore had a direct conflict of interest and broke parliamentary [rules](#) <sup>21</sup> in participating in the inquiry, let alone chairing it and taking responsibility for its report.

For these reasons, we advise caution in accepting the analysis or recommendations of this inquiry.

**‘6) The rejection by the 2018 UNISON women’s conference of a motion “Nordic Model Now!” which called for women’s conference to affirm its policy of supporting the Nordic Model, a legal model based on decriminalising the selling of sex acts while introducing a ‘sex buyers’ law’ criminalising those who purchase sex acts.**

This motion was lost by a small margin and the 2010 policy remains in place.

**‘Conference further notes that New Zealand decriminalised sex work in 2003. Since then, this has come to be known as the ‘New Zealand model’. The legislation recognises sex work as work, and it is therefore covered by employment law. Sex workers have the legal right to refuse any client for any reason at any point – the law treats sex workers’ consent as crucial.’**

We have explained earlier about the dangers of recognizing prostitution as work. It sounds so good on paper that “sex workers” are covered by employment law, but in New Zealand it hasn’t worked out well in [practice](#).<sup>22</sup>

New Zealand introduced its full decriminalisation law in the [Prostitution Reform Act](#) (PRA) 2003. Soon afterwards brothels started setting the price through “all inclusives” and prices fell. Men expect more, including anal, kissing, and no condoms. Where before the men paid for the act – direct to the woman – now they pay the brothel, by the hour or half hour, and they expect whatever they want as many times as possible within that time.

Punter violence remains common and in 2008 the New Zealand Prostitution Law Review Committee [found](#)<sup>23</sup> that a majority of prostituted persons felt that the PRA “could do little about violence that occurred.” The Committee further reported that abusive brothels did not improve conditions for prostituted individuals; the brothels that “had unfair management practices continued with them.”

People campaigning for the PRA wanted to improve things for the women – to give them more power. In fact, the PRA has had the opposite effect. More power has gone to the pimps and punters. Although police violence is now less common, women seldom report pimp and punter violence to the police.

Local authorities and residents have some control over where the larger brothels are sited, but none over the smaller ones, classified as “Small Owner Operated Brothels” (or [SOOBs](#)<sup>24</sup>). There’s been rapid expansion in the number of SOOBs, and many are run by pimps. SOOBs are excluded from the official brothel data, which therefore gives a distorted view of the reality.

Sex trafficking is now [recognised](#)<sup>25</sup> to be prevalent in New Zealand, and Māori and Pacific Islander women and children are disproportionately represented. Because brothels and SOOBs are legal, there is little or no oversight from the police.

The PRA has also failed to stop the prostitution of [children](#),<sup>26</sup> which remains a major problem. [Mama Tere Strickland](#),<sup>27</sup> a community worker, says: “At least the old law kept a lid on the numbers, but with no law on the streets, the pimps and gangs have moved in.” The children typically have family violence and sexual abuse in their backgrounds.

Since the change in the law there’s been a [significant rise](#)<sup>28</sup> in reported rape, sexual assault, and other male violence against women and girls in the general population. This is not surprising, given that there’s been an increase in the amount of prostitution, and [evidence](#)<sup>29</sup> shows that prostitution-buying makes men more prone to sexual violence.

**‘The New Zealand model has been praised by women’s rights organisations, human rights organisations, and international bodies such as the UN and the World Health Organisation as the best legal approach to protect the safety, rights, and health of people who sell sex.’**

It is incorrect to say that the UN itself has stated that the New Zealand approach is best – although it is true that some of the UN subsidiary bodies, such as the WHO and UNAIDS, have done so. But as we’ve [explained](#)<sup>30</sup> earlier, their support is based on flawed modelling, incorrect use of statistics, and advice by an organisation that was under the leadership of a now convicted pimp/ trafficker.

Janice Raymond has recently completed [research](#)<sup>31</sup> that shows the New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective (NZPC), which promotes the full decriminalisation of the sex trade, also plays a key role in gatekeeping the PRA legislation – which is a blatant conflict of interest and contrary to good governance. She also exposes some of the inconvenient truths – for example, that there were 914 applications for brothel operator certificates in the seven years from 2004 to 2011 but only 23 brothel inspections in the 12 years from 2003. Raymond says:

*“When a country codifies prostitution as normal work, it is almost impossible for a governmental report to cast its evaluation and recommendations outside the labor paradigm. A labor framework tones down existing abuse of women because committee members frame such exploitation as a breakdown in labor relations rather than violence against women. Violence and coercion become “exploitative working conditions.” Lack of autonomy and low levels of women’s well-being are reported as occupational hazards to be remedied by better work conditions and minimized in scope. Even the terms “sex work” and “sex worker” reinforce this emphasis.”*

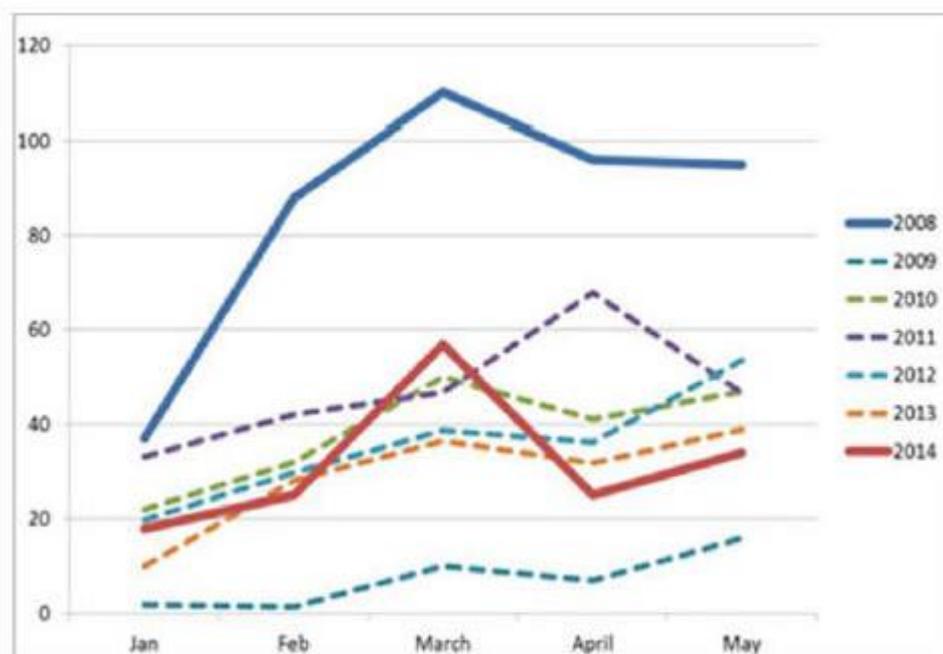
For a succinct account of some of the problems with the New Zealand approach, we recommend [What lies beneath prostitution policy in New Zealand?](#)<sup>32</sup>

**‘There is no legal model anywhere in the world that has been shown to increase, or decrease, the number of people who sell sex.’**

This is simply not true. There has been extensive research that shows that legalisation/ full decriminalisation of the sex trade causes more people to be drawn into prostitution in general and more sex trafficking in particular. For example:

- A [study](#)<sup>33</sup> with data from 150 countries found that countries with “legalized prostitution experience a larger reported incidence of trafficking inflows.”
- An [economic analysis](#)<sup>34</sup> concluded the same thing, as did an [extensive study](#)<sup>35</sup> by the European Parliament.
- Research in [New Zealand](#)<sup>36</sup> showed an increase in street prostitution after the PRA.

Research in [Norway](#)<sup>37</sup> since the introduction of the Nordic Model in 2009 has shown a significant **decrease** in the numbers of individuals selling sex – as shown in the following chart: *The number of street prostitutes in Oslo 2008 – 2014*

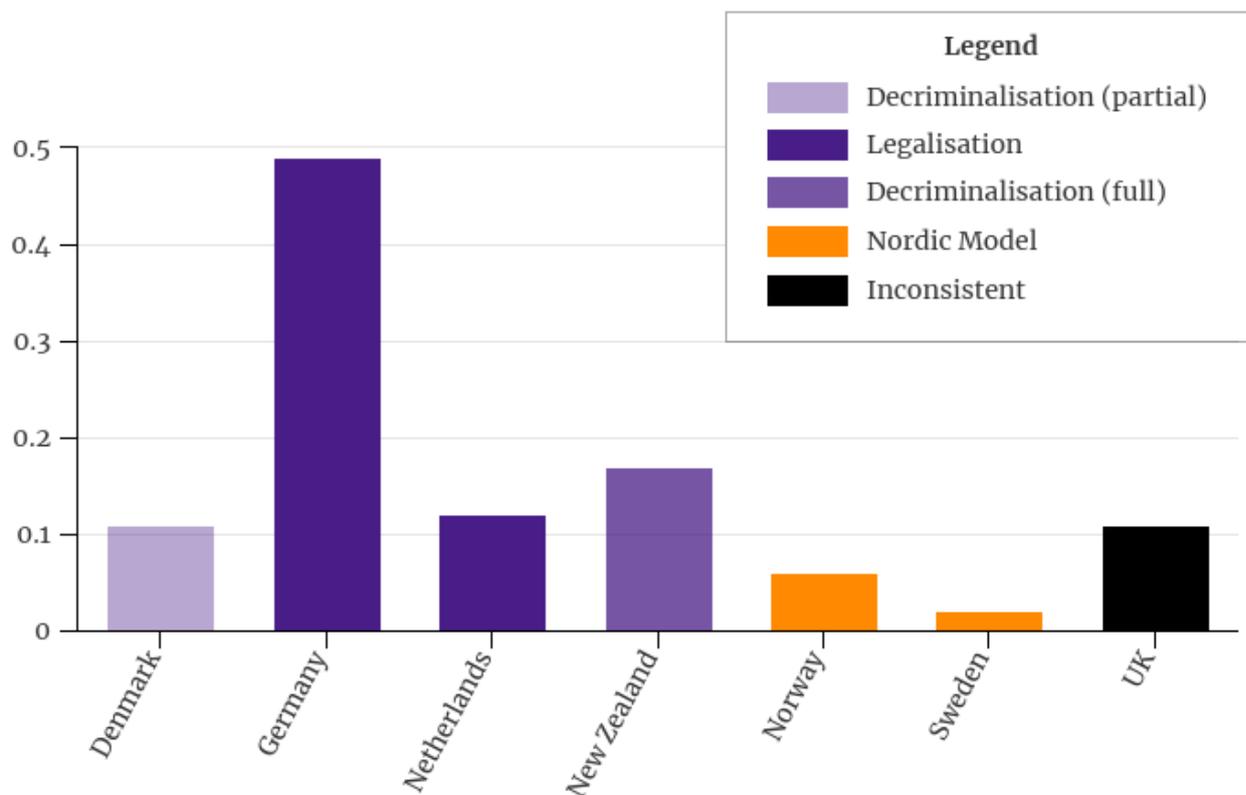


Similarly [research](#)<sup>38</sup> in Sweden has shown a significant **decrease** in the size of the prostitution market.

While the numbers of people in prostitution may be hard to measure with great accuracy, it is possible to arrive at approximate figures for those involved in prostitution in each country. By presenting these as a percentage of the population of the country, we can get a comparative figure, as shown in the following table and chart.

Country	People in prostitution	Total population	% pop in prostitution	Sex trade
Denmark	<a href="#">6,000</a> <sup>39</sup>	5,655,750	0.11%	Decriminalised (partial)
Germany	<a href="#">400,000</a> <sup>40</sup>	80,996,690	0.49%	Legalised
Netherlands	<a href="#">20,000</a> <sup>41</sup>	16,877,350	0.12%	Legalised
New Zealand	<a href="#">8,000</a> <sup>42</sup>	4,705,818	0.17%	Decriminalised (full)
Norway	<a href="#">3,000</a> <sup>43</sup>	5,258,317	0.06%	Nordic Model
Sweden	<a href="#">2,500</a> <sup>44</sup>	10,004,962	0.02%	Nordic Model
UK	<a href="#">72,800</a> <sup>45</sup>	64,100,000	0.11%	Inconsistent*

\* The law in the UK does ostensibly ban pimping and brothel keeping but it is poorly implemented and in [many places](#)<sup>46</sup> pimping and brothel-keeping operate with virtual impunity.



### *Percentage of the population in prostitution*

This shows very clearly that under the Nordic Model in Sweden and Norway far fewer people are involved in prostitution (relative to the population) than in countries that have legalised or decriminalised buying sex. When pimping and brothel keeping are also allowed (as in Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand), the percentage of people in prostitution is even higher.

The trend is clear: the more liberal the regime towards punters, pimps, and brothel owners, the more people end up in prostitution.

### **‘All that laws can change is whether people do sex work in dangerous conditions or in safer conditions’**

Prostitution is inherently [violent](#)<sup>47</sup> and nothing can make it safe. It is damaging to the individuals who are prostituted and it’s damaging to society as a whole. It increases the objectification of women and girls and men’s sense of entitlement. It therefore contributes to the [epidemic](#)<sup>48</sup> of male violence against women and children that we are currently witnessing.

As we have shown earlier, no law can bring prostitution into line with Health & Safety norms or international standards of “decent work.”

Laws can and do make a difference in how people understand prostitution and whether it is sanctioned by society. Full decriminalisation doesn't make it safe and is likely to lead to an increase in the numbers involved in prostitution – leading to more harm overall.

**‘Conference recognises that decriminalisation is not about ‘encouraging’ sex work – it’s about the safety of people who sell sex. It also recognises that as a trade union we should be listening to the workers – to sex workers – and should not be calling for laws which put sex workers, including women and LGBT sex workers, at greater risk’**

The aim of full decriminalisation may not be about encouraging sex work, but that is one of its consequences, as we have shown.

One of the primary purposes of the criminal law is to make it clear what society considers unacceptable and to discourage people from doing those things. So when something that was previously illegal is no longer a criminal offence, it sends out the message that society now considers that to be acceptable – gay marriage is a positive example of this.

When a country decides to decriminalise the entire sex trade, it sends out the message that buying sexual access to other people is now considered a normal, legitimate, and acceptable thing to do, and so is profiting from other people’s prostitution. This inevitably leads to an increase in those activities.

Prostitution affects everyone and so every single one of us has a stake in policy surrounding it. We do not base major decisions on the future of controversial industries (like fracking and nuclear weapons) solely on the views of the people working in them. That someone enjoys their job in fracking is irrelevant to the decision whether we as a society want it. Of course, those who lose their income because an industry is closed down must be given help to exit, retrain, etc. The Nordic Model specifically includes this provision.

**‘Conference therefore recognises that UNISON should no longer call for the introduction of a ‘sex buyers’ law’**

For all of the reasons explained above, we believe this is misguided and that the Nordic Model/ Sex Buyer Law is the best approach to prostitution policy that has yet been devised and so the policy to support it should be retained.

**‘In addition, Conference notes that TUC Congress discussed sex work for the first time in 2017, when it debated a motion submitted by ASLEF and seconded by the GMB calling for the TUC to support full decriminalisation. The motion was defeated, but it has started a wider debate in the trade union movement on sex work.**

**It therefore calls on the NEC to begin a dialogue with the National LGBT Committee, National Women’s Committee and other appropriate bodies within the union with a view to reviewing and advancing UNISON policy in this area.’**

Any consideration of policy on prostitution must be rooted in a vision of social justice, human rights, and true equality for all.

## References

All links retrieved on 12 May 2018

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- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.unison.org.uk/motions/2010/national-delegate-conference/demand-change/>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://nordicmodelnow.org/myths-about-prostitution/myth-the-nordic-model-hinders-the-global-fight-against-hiv/>
- <sup>3</sup> <http://hlp-wee.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-report-2016-09-call-to-action-en.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/MichLawJourI.html>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://logosjournal.com/2014/watson/>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.havocscope.com/prostitution-revenue-by-country/>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://nordicmodelnow.org/myths-about-prostitution/myth-the-nordic-model-hinders-the-global-fight-against-hiv/>
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