

Trafficking in Human Beings – Focus on Sex Trafficking

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and culture. The purpose of our organization is to build solidarity between young people of developing and developed nations and train young people to articulate the principle that every human being has intrinsic, inherent worth. This intrinsic worth common to the human person is the foundation of every human right.

Trafficking, and in particular, the trafficking of women and children in the sex trade, is currently a global phenomenon. Countries of the OSCE supply sex workers, are the destination for trafficked sex workers, and often times are a combination of both. Trafficking is rightly called “modern day slavery” and its prevalence around the world is a violation of human rights and the shame of nations and international institutions.

The World Youth Alliance wishes to point to the drivers behind sex trafficking today, namely, the high demand for sex workers and how current policies and laws foster and encourage this demand. At the heart of this high demand for sex work, which turns the exploitation of human beings into an industry, is the gradual legitimization of sex work as a valid profession and a form of decent work. Efforts to stop sex trafficking around the world cannot succeed as long as the exploitation of men, women and children through prostitution (consensual or not) is understood as “decent work”.

The ILO currently defines decent work as “productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection. It also means sufficient work, in the sense that all should have full access to income-earning opportunities.” The purpose of the ILO is to promote employment opportunities “in conditions of...human dignity.” The definition is flawed because dignity is inherent to human beings; it cannot be created by the State or any other body. In the context of sex work, we cannot create conditions of human dignity by granting social protection and a living wage to sex workers. They have inherent dignity, which gives us the duty to create policies and laws that respect it.

Prostitution itself is a violation of the inherent dignity of human beings, as it places the sex worker in an exploitative and objectifying position. This occurs even when sex work is completely consensual, although this happens rarely because of conditions of poverty and instability that normally surround entry into prostitution.

The vast majority of sex workers are trafficked sex workers, and the legitimization and legalization of prostitution prevents law enforcement officials from investigating, apprehending and prosecuting brothel owners who have participated in trafficking. The legalization of prostitution gives rights to brothel owners and traffickers as legitimate business owners, and therefore fosters the demand for sex, the demand for exploitation.

We recommend that OSCE countries work to amend the current definition of decent work to exclude “sex work” or prostitution. This will be the first step in combating sex trafficking and creating conditions in which the dignity of every person is respected.