Why Legalized Prostitution Would Harm Romania

Family Research Council, a U.S. Non-Governmental Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

Family Research Council (“FRC”) is a U.S. non-governmental research and educational organization headquartered in Washington D.C. that is focused on the vital role the family plays in every society. It has provided research and analysis to policy makers in the United States and other countries around the world and at the United Nations.

II. LEGALIZING PROSTITUTION HARMs WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND SOCIETY

Prostitution is a criminal offense in the majority of countries, including most of the E.U. member states.[4] The criminalization of prostitution reflects a longstanding consensus that prostitution harms women, children, and society.[5] Prostitution ought to remain illegal in Romania for several compelling reasons. First, legalization of prostitution is inevitably accompanied by an increase in human trafficking, which is already a worldwide scourge. Second, legalization of prostitution does not improve the wellbeing of prostitutes. Third, it encourages women to become prostitutes and encourages prostitution clients, so-called “johns,” to believe that their predatory behavior toward women and children is socially acceptable. Fourth, it increases the number of child prostitutes.

A. Legalization of Prostitution Leads to an Increase in Sex Trafficking

The demand for prostitutes increases after prostitution is legalized.[7] As a result, sex trafficking, a form of modern day slavery where, primarily, women and children become victims of sexual exploitation by force, fraud, or coercion, increases when prostitution is legalized.[8] Prostitution is legal in Victoria, Australia. Kathleen Maltzhan writes, “It is commonly assumed that trafficked women are found predominantly in illegal brothels. In Victoria at least, this is not the case – trafficked women have been located in a number of legal brothels.”[9] A U.K. study summarized the link between legalization and trafficking:

Legalisation is a “pull factor” for traffickers. Project Respect estimates, “at least seven licensed brothels in Victoria have used trafficked women in the last year.” An Australian Institute of Criminology study estimated that Australian brothels earned $1 million a week from illegal prostitution. Mary Sullivan and Sheila Jeffreys point out that, “Legalisation was intended to eliminate
organized crime from the sex industry. In fact the reverse has happened. Legalisation has brought with it an explosion in the trafficking of women into prostitution by organized crime. Convicted criminals, fronted by supposedly more reputable people, remain in the business.” (quoting Sullivan, M and Jeffreys, S, 2000, Legalising Prostitution is Not the Answer: The Example of Victoria, Australia, Melbourne, CATW page 12). In Victoria, estimates from the police and the legal brothel industry put the number of illegal brothels at 400, four times more than the legal ones (Murphy 2002). In 1994, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) stated that in the Netherlands alone: “nearly 70 per cent of trafficked women were from CEEC [Central and Eastern European Countries]” (IOM, 1995).

Sex trafficking is accompanied by violence against the women. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that traffickers use violence to “condition” women for prostitution. The goal is to terrify the woman into compliance with the pimp and with customers. Kathleen Maltzhan writes, “[V]iolence serves two functions. Firstly, pre-prostitution violence aims to break the women’s will . . . Secondly, this rape teaches women how to do prostitution sex and impresses on them that they must ‘satisfy’ their ‘customers’ and cannot refuse them or their demands, including sex without condoms.”

Approximately 600,000 to 800,000 victims annually are trafficked across international borders worldwide. After drug dealing, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and is the fastest growing. The number of trafficking victims would logically increase if Romania legalizes prostitution, thereby subjecting more women and children to extreme sexual exploitation. This is one of many unintended but unavoidable, severe consequences of the legalization of prostitution. Since we know that trafficked women often end up in forced prostitution in countries that have legalized or decriminalized prostitution, such as the Netherlands, (see footnote 4) such countries and their governments bear a great measure of responsibility for the plight of those who are trafficked.

B. Legalizing Prostitution Does Not Improve the Well-Being of Prostitutes and Perpetuates Violence

Prostitution is violent work, whether it is illegal street prostitution or legal brothel prostitution. “It is a cruel lie to suggest that decriminalization or legalization will protect anyone in prostitution. It is not possible to protect someone whose source of income exposes them to the likelihood of being raped on average once a week.” Melissa Farley, Ph. D. points out that legal prostitution is not a haven from harm for those involved. “In the Netherlands, where prostitution is legal, 60% of prostituted women suffered physical assaults; 70% experienced verbal threats of physical assault; 40% experienced sexual violence; and 40% had been forced into prostitution or sexual abuse by acquaintances.”

Legal prostitution also does not improve the health of prostitutes. Prostitution has been legal in the African country of Senegal since 1970. Prostitutes are required to receive regular health exams and free condoms. However, the rate of HIV infection is still rising among them. In New Zealand, only seventy-seven percent of prostitutes reported that they always used a condom. In Australia, legalization of prostitution has been accompanied by a sharp increase in women with reported HIV infections. Women are also at risk for contracting other STDs. It appears that condom use is also inconsistent. Thus, the
argument that better education of prostitutes and thus, fewer health consequences will be byproducts of legalization or decriminalization is not borne out by experience.

Prostitution, even legal prostitution, is accompanied by drug and alcohol abuse. Over fifty percent of prostitutes surveyed in New Zealand who worked on the street reported that they entered prostitution to support a drug or alcohol addiction. Those who do not have a drug or alcohol problem when they begin prostitution are prone to develop such an addiction while working as a prostitute. For example, a participant in the New Zealand survey stated that she would stop working as a prostitute when she was accepted into a drug rehabilitation program. A U.K. study found that many prostitutes work to support their drug habit. Thus, rather than legalize or decriminalize prostitution, government action should be directed toward rehabilitation of those women with alcohol and drug problems.

Even legal prostitution causes a lot of wear and tear on a person’s body. One prostitute who had worked in a legal brothel said, “Um well the last parlour I worked at... it was competition. I mean I was on, you know, I’d do the 4 to 12 shift and then the 12 to 8.” When asked about the downside or working as a prostitute, one woman said, “The wear and tear on your body. Um looking after yourself so you don’t burn out and stuff, mentally and physically and spiritually, I guess, and being yourself throughout that whole time.” The New Zealand study reported, “Many participants talked of the physical and mental stress of the work.”

Although prostitution is illegal in Israel, women frequently travel there willingly (non-trafficked) for the purpose of prostitution. A study of women who were being held for deportation after being arrested for prostitution found that there were higher levels of stress related to prostitution among them than among prostitutes working in illegal brothels. However, almost half of the women in both groups had considered suicide, and a fifth of the women in both groups had attempted suicide at least once. Half of the women who had attempted suicide had made multiple attempts.

The majority of prostitutes become prostitutes because of financial difficulties. Even when prostitution is legalized, the power still remains in the hands of the brothel owner or pimp. “The legal position of prostitutes is not good. Under the current circumstances, despite the factual existence of employer-employee relationships, the risk of being unable to work is completely shifted onto the prostitute.” Even aside from the lack of benefits provided to prostitutes, they are still often exploited by the owners of brothels and massage parlors. “[I]llegal and legal escort services and massage parlours are regulated. This makes most massage parlour owners easily charge sex workers and in some cases, prostitutes have to hand over all their money.” The brothels often are also terrible places to work, even where brothels are legal.

Decriminalization does not solve the financial problems of prostitutes. Working at a brothel costs the prostitute a significant amount of money in expenses. The prostitute is not in charge and much of her income (if not all her income) is taken by those who control her.

Prostitution, legal or illegal, is simply not a path to financial independence. While the majority of prostitutes begin prostitution for financial reasons, the majority remain in the prostitution industry for the very same reason. Furthermore, women who are trafficked are usually told that they owe money to the trafficker, and have to work against their will, often
for years, to pay it off. By any definition, such work by trafficked women must be called by its proper name, rape!

C. Legalizing Prostitution Encourages Women to Become Prostitutes and “Johns” to Believe That Their Predatory Behavior Toward Women and Children is Socially Acceptable

Legalizing prostitution encourages women to become prostitutes. In New Zealand, a quarter of the women surveyed listed legalization as a reason why they had become prostitutes. The study notes that legalization was not a primary reason women gave for making this choice. However, it is reasonable that women would be more likely to enter a line of work that promises some benefits when a counterbalancing sanction is removed. As one women said, “Well it is legally for us a job…So you know, my opinion on it is now, now that the laws have changed, it is for us, it’s a professional job and I don’t see any bad things about it, cause you know, everyone in life goes through that stage where they go through so much.”

Prostitution preys upon the most desperate members of society. As indicated earlier, most women become prostitutes out of financial necessity. It is the most common reason cited for engaging in prostitution. Twenty percent of the survey participants had been engaged in prostitution for less than a year, and of that twenty percent, nearly half expected to leave the trade in less than a year. This suggests that these women turn to prostitution as the only way to obtain money for the time being, but have no desire to remain as prostitutes for a substantial period of time. It also suggests that women may begin prostitution intending to only engage in it for a short period of time, but find that their financial situation does not stabilize. Again, financial reasons were the most common reason given for staying in the prostitution industry.

According to Bindel & Kelly, legalization also makes it more difficult for women to leave prostitution. Since prostitution is now legally considered a job like any other, there isn’t perceived to be a need to help women leave the “profession.”

It is arguable that as legitimacy increases, the support for exit programmes will decrease, and it is clear that few if any services are provided for women in the off street sector, despite over two thirds of it being illegal, and research revealing continued elements of coercion and control. The Australian country report reveals that the promised exit and support strategies never materialised, and Dutch research shows a strong desire for such programmes in the Netherlands.

Prostitution encourages clients of prostitutes, the so-called “johns,” to believe that their predatory behavior toward women and children in prostitution is socially acceptable. Hence, the demand for prostitution increases. “Contrary to claims that legalization and decriminalization would control the expansion of the sex industry, prostitution now accounts for 5% of the Netherlands economy (Daley, 2001, p. 4). Over the last decade, as pimping was legalized, and brothels decriminalized in the year 2000, the sex industry increased by 25% in the Netherlands (Daley, 2001, p.4).” The consequences to a nation of an increasing prostitution rate can hardly be positive.

D. Legalized Prostitution Increases the Number of Child Prostitutes
Child prostitution is today a fixture of all countries. In societies where prostitution is legal or tolerated, selling a daughter into prostitution may seem to some to be a reasonable decision. Piamsuk Mensaveta writes of Thai women, “[P]arents can hardly feed themselves and find it nearly impossible to refuse money for selling their daughters, it is hard to change their attitudes, as sex work can make enough money for parents to live on. This excessive irregularity of selling daughters has become commonly accepted among Thai women.” This evil is further encouraged by the commercial desirability of child prostitutes.

Traffickers will import children for the purpose of prostitution in countries where parents do not sell their children into prostitution. Bindel and Kelly write:

> Child prostitution in the Netherlands has significantly increased during the last ten years. The ChildRight organisation in Amsterdam estimates that there are now more than 15,000 children (primarily girls) being prostituted, an increase of eleven thousand since 1996. Five thousand of these children are thought to be from other countries, mainly Nigeria (Tiggloven, 2001).

In the United States, where prostitution is not legal (with a few areas excepted), it is nevertheless prevalent due to toleration by public authorities or lack of law enforcement resources to attack it. In your authors’ opinion, these factors have increased the numbers of children involved. The numbers of child prostitutes in the U.S. may be in the hundreds of thousands.

Dr. Raymond writes, “[C]hild prostitution has dramatically risen in Victoria compared to other Australian states where prostitution has not been legalized. Of all the states and territories in Australia, the highest number of reported incidences of child prostitution came from Victoria. In a 1998 study undertaken by ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking), who conducted research for the Australian National Inquiry on Child Prostitution, there was increased evidence of organized commercial exploitation of children.”

The certitude that child prostitution will increase with legalized prostitution must be a critical consideration by those countries considering legalizing prostitution.

Legal prostitution thus is a cause of sexual trafficking, declining health of those involved, and an increase in prostitution, including child prostitution. Thus, in your authors’ opinion, Farley correctly concludes that “(j)ohns who buy women, groups promoting legalized prostitution, and governments that support state-sponsored sex industries comprise a tripartite partnership that endangers all women. These groups collude in denying the everyday violence and subsequent health dangers to those in prostitution.”
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Maximum Penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Austria</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Bulgaria</td>
<td>3 years</td>
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<td>3. Cyprus</td>
<td>7 years</td>
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<td>4. Czech Republic</td>
<td>2 years</td>
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<td>5. Denmark</td>
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<td>6. Finland</td>
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<td>7 years</td>
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<td>14. Sweden</td>
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<td>15. United Kingdom</td>
<td>2 years</td>
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1. Belgium
2. France
3. Luxembourg
4. Netherlands
5. Portugal
6. Spain
7. Estonia
8. Latvia
9. Lithuania
10. Malta
11. Slovakia
12. Slovenia

Other Countries
1. Canada                | 14 years        |
2. Iceland               | 4 years         |
3. Norway                | 1 year          |
4. South Africa          | 3 years         |
5. Switzerland           | 2 years         |
6. United States         | 0–20 years,     |
                        | depending on the state

*While these states do not provide penalties for adult incest most of them class close relation as an aggravating factor for other sexual offenses.
Mr. Trueman is a recognized legal expert on obscenity, indecency, pornography, sexual trafficking, prostitution, and the protection of communities from sexually oriented businesses. Mr. Trueman was the chief of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Criminal Division, at the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., from 1988 to 1993. While there, Mr. Trueman supervised the prosecution of child sex crimes, child pornography, and obscenity. He managed an office of 20 prosecutors and support staff, working with the nation’s 93 U.S. Attorneys to initiate and coordinate federal prosecutions.

The Alliance Defense Fund (“ADF”) is a U.S. non-governmental organization that litigates and provides strategic planning, training, and funding to attorneys and organizations regarding religious civil liberties, sanctity of life, and family values. ADF’s allies include more than 1,200 lawyers and numerous public interest law firms.

J.D. Candidate, 2009, Notre Dame School of Law. Keith J. Miller, Esq., compiled the chart that appears as “Appendix A.”


Prostitution has been legalized or decriminalized in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Senegal, Singapore, Switzerland, and Turkey. It has also been legalized or decriminalized in several Australian states and the U.S. state of Nevada. However, this list includes countries where prostitution is not illegal, but is not a recognized profession (Denmark, Latvia) and countries where prostitution incurs official sanctions (Turkey requires that prostitutes be unmarried. Furthermore, their children are “barred from occupying high rank in the army or police, or marrying persons of such rank, . . . .”).

Id. Of the twenty-seven EU member states, only seven (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) have legalized or decriminalized prostitution.

The majority of nations and states that have legalized or decriminalized prostitution did so during the 1990s and 2000s.

Julie Bindel & Liz Kelly, A Critical Examination of Responses to Prostitution in Four Countries: Victoria, Australia; Ireland; the Netherlands; and Sweden, London Metropolitan University, 13 (2003), “Legalisation increases the growth of the sex industry. There has been a significant increase in the number of brothels in Victoria, Australia, since legalization, the number of legitimate brothels grew from 40 in 1989 to 94 in 1999 (Raymond 2002),” available at http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C19E010B-1A4F-4918-97BD-F96AF7D7F150/0/mainreport.pdf.


The Netherlands is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Within the Netherlands, victims are often trafficked by so called “lover boys” – men who seduce young women and girls and coerce them into prostitution. Women
and girls are trafficked to the Netherlands from Nigeria, Bulgaria, China, Sierra Leone, and Romania, as well as other countries in Eastern Europe, for sexual exploitation and, to a lesser extent, forced labor. Men are trafficked to the Netherlands from India, China, Bangladesh, and Turkey for forced labor and sexual exploitation.

Prostitution, which is a contributing factor to the phenomenon of human trafficking, remains legal in the Netherlands within a government-regulated sector; however, the government undertook countermeasures to identify and prevent trafficking within the prostitution sector...


Sex traffickers use a variety of methods to “condition” their victims including starvation, confinement, beatings, physical abuse, rape, gang rape, threats of violence to the victims and the victims’ families, forced drug use and the threat of shaming their victims by revealing their activities to their family and their families’ friends.


[17] For a discussion on the specific physical health consequences of prostitution such as exhaustion, frequent viral illness, STDs, vaginal infections, back aches, sleeplessness, depression, headaches, stomachaches, eating disorders, cancer, etc. see Farley, id at 1097 and pages following.


[19] Id.

[20] Id. at 145:
This research shows that young African women are vulnerable to HIV infection because sexual relations with men are an important means to achieve social and economic status, and for some women they are necessary for survival. These data show that Senegalese prostitutes, because of their high HIV prevalence, represent a reservoir of HIV infection and a core group for HIV transmission into Senegalese society.

In spite of the report of condom use by a majority of prostitutes and clients, evidence has shown that utilization is inconsistent in both groups. According to surveillance data, HIV prevalence has doubled among registered prostitutes in the last few years. This suggests that in spite of information and free condoms, a number of prostitutes engage in unprotected sex.


[22] Bindel & Kelly, supra note 7, at 17. “In Victoria between 2000 and 2002 there has been a 91 per cent increase in number of women presenting with HIV infections, within the general increase of 56 per cent (Altman 2002).”

[23] Id.


[26] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24:

“So then (on entering a drug rehabilitation programme) I will be quitting, because I’m just at that point where I need to turn my life around, and I know I can do it, because I’m just, you know, I’ve had enough and I want to do it. I want to make changes. I can’t do that if I’m still working, you know.”

[27] Bindel & Kelly, supra note 7, at 9.


[30] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24:

“Yeah, like I’m really, I’m getting to a stage now, I’m 34, it’s like I’m not young and (.) dumb or – I’m just so much more aware of things that it’s actually hard for me to
do the job now. It’s quite a bit of a struggle mentally… like mentally I’m able to handle the job better than when I was younger, because I don’t need the can actually mentally handle it now.”


[32] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24 (reporting that 73.3 percent of prostitutes reported that they became prostitutes for financial reasons).


[34] Mensaveta, supra note 25, at 31.


“The physical appearance of these buildings is shocking,” says Farley. “They look like wide trailers with barbed wire around them - little jails.” The rooms all have panic buttons, but many women told her that they had experienced violent and sexual abuse from the customers and pimps.

“I saw a grated iron door in one brothel,” says Farley. ”The women's food was shoved through the door's steel bars between the kitchen and the brothel area. One pimp starved a woman he considered too fat. She made a friend outside the brothel who would throw food over the fence for her.”

[36] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24:

“Um well if we had to talk about parlours, um the fact that you actually have to pay someone first, like you’ve got a boss, is not good. To me that’s not good, because it’s you that’s doing the job, not them. You’re paying for a room, that basically you shouldn’t have to. And the fact that clients have to pay a door fee even before they walk in, and especially if like the client decides that he just wants a massage and nothing else, you basically still have to pay for the room that you’ve used, yet you’ve got no money out of it… So I mean it’s taking money away from you, and I think that’s just unfair…Um privately, you can’t call the shots. You can basically give your details to the client over the phone, but you don’t know who you’re going to get at the door. That’s the problem. At least on the street you can virtually see the person. They’re there in person, you can see if they’re on something or, you know, if they’re hesitant or they look suspicious, then, yeah. So that’s like the big difference between those.”

[37] Mensaveta, supra note 25, at 113 (“Conclusively, the years of sex work have not improved the health of their finances, but have actually somewhat weakened their economic status, such as Jieb, Hope and Nid.”).

[38] Maltzhan, supra note 9:

The next stage is the exploitation through prostitution when traffickers in Australia start making a return on their ‘investment’ - the woman. Trafficked women generally pay off
‘debts’ calculated in terms of dollars, ‘jobs’ or months. A typical debt for a Thai woman is between $35,000 and $50,000. Project Respect has been told of women with debts of up to $80,000. ‘Job’ requirements are typically between 500 and 1000. Some traffickers may also require women to stay on after the debt is paid off.


[41] Mensaveta, supra note 25, at 113 (“[F]emale poverty appears to be the main factor persuading these women to enter prostitution when they were 15 years of age or younger. But some of these interviewees were sold, tortured or otherwise persuaded to do sex work for the first time by their own parents and relatives.”).

[42] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24 (reporting that 73 percent of participants began prostitution for financial reasons, and 82 percent remained in prostitution for financial reasons).

[43] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24, at Table 5.4.

[44] “Entry Into Sex Work,” supra note 24, at Table 5.5.

[45] Bindel & Kelly, supra note 7, at 18.

[46] Bindel & Kelly, supra note 7, at 19.


[48] Mensaveta, supra note 25, at 69. Direct prostitution is technically illegal in Thailand, however, it is widely practiced, and indirect forms of prostitution, such as escort services and massage parlours, are legal.

[49] Mensaveta, supra note 25, at 33–34:

Girl prostitutes are testimony to the shocking unpalatable fact that the practice of sexual abuse by men offers a solution for many poverty stricken girls. . . .

Vanistendael and Vogel have written about the values of life of child prostitutes. He has translated the demand for child prostitutes as a higher purchasing power that places the price of sex work for young girls as a way to get out of poverty.

[50] Bindel & Kelly, supra note 7, at 15.


[52] Raymond, supra note 47.