

Press Statement

Prostitution reform should send clear message against exploitation and gender inequality

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) reiterates its stance in favour of a prostitution reform that respects the dignity of women and that sends a clear message against exploitation and gender inequality. When discussing the issue, it is crucial to bear in mind that prostitution is not gender-neutral since the absolute majority of prostitutes are women while the absolute majority of pimps and clients are men. Thus, prostitution is primarily an exercise in power and control of men over women.

The NCPE is in total agreement with the decriminalization of prostitution since prostitutes should not be penalised for suffering exploitation. The prostitution reform should ensure that the country has all the necessary legal and social means to assist persons to exit prostitution as well as create the conditions where no person has to resort to prostitution for a living.

Moreover, the State should send a clear message that prostitution is a form of exploitation that reproduces and reinforces a patriarchal society. In this context, sex-buyers should be penalised. There should be an effective strategy for a crackdown on pimps and traffickers, often operating through businesses such as massage parlours and strip clubs. Only in this way can the sex market, which is inherently exploitative and which preys on vulnerable individuals, be narrowed.

The alternative scenario to this, one where the law legitimises pimps and clients, would inevitably lead to the widening of the sex market, increasing both the demand as well as the need for supply. To assuage the supply Malta would become a magnet for human trafficking and the proliferation of sex-buying would leave a deleterious impact on society by normalising unequal relations between women and men.

It needs to be highlighted that more clients of prostitution would also mean an increase in the number of persons who unknowingly are in a relationship with a client, increasing the spreading of STDs. These persons too often suffer the negative physical and psychological consequences of sex-buying from their partners.

The NCPE calls for a prostitution reform that is based on protection from exploitation and on the strengthening of gender equality. The State has an obligation to de-normalise prostitution and address the legal and social realities that give rise to this exploitative market.

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