

**Jerusalem Institute of Justice Input to
UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls
Re: Sex-Based Violence Against Women and Girls in Israel's Prostitution Industry**

Dear Ms. Reem Alsalem,

We deeply appreciate your October 2024 Position Paper on *lessons learned from the implementation of exit programs for women in prostitution*. In support of your forthcoming report to the UN Human Rights Council on *new frontiers and emerging issues of the forms of sex-based violence against women and girls*, the Jerusalem Institute of Justice submits this input concerning the rights of prostituted women and girls in Israel.

On December 31, 2018, the Israeli Knesset officially adopted the *Prohibition on Consuming Prostitution Act*. This law is based on the Abolitionist/Equality/Nordic Model which has been implemented by Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Canada, Ireland, France, the Republic of Korea, Northern Ireland, and the State of Maine in the United States. In adopting this law, Israel became the first state in the Middle East region to adopt the Abolitionist model for combatting the exploitation of women and girls in the prostitution industry.

As a core member of the Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Prostitution, a task force of 20 Israeli civil society organizations, the Jerusalem Institute of Justice (JIJ) led the effort to develop and promote this legal framework within Israel. JIJ remains engaged in the law's implementation as a provider of pro bono legal services for trafficked women and girls. In 2024, we provided legal aid to 9 women and girls exiting the prostitution industry, securing their rights to housing, debt relief, and lawful immigration status.

Israel's Approach to Punishing Consumers of Prostitution

The Israeli version of the Abolitionist Model defines consumption of prostitution as a civil offense for which violators can be fined 2,000 NIS (\$500 USD) for a first offense and 4,000 NIS (\$1,000 USD) for subsequent violations. Serial offenders can be fined as much as 70,000 NIS (\$20,000 USD) and face possible incarceration. Crucially, the law assumes that any woman found inside a brothel is a victim of exploitation, and a man found in a brothel is an unlawful consumer, regardless of his claims to the contrary.

The law offers violators the option, instead of paying a fine, of attending a series of educational sessions given by the Adult Probation Service, whose objective is to change the offender's perspectives on the consumption of prostitution. The law also provides funding for the rehabilitation of victims, and obligates the Ministries of Social Services and Homeland Security

to report annually to the Knesset Constitution Committee regarding the law's implementation and its effect on the rehabilitation of and assistance given to prostituted people.

The Challenges of Implementation

In 2016, Israel's Welfare Ministry estimated there were 11,420-12,730 prostituted people driving the country's 1.2 billion NIS (\$318 million USD) industry. According to that report, 71% of prostituted women said they entered the sex trade out of financial desperation, and 76% said they would leave the industry if they could.

The Israeli version of the Nordic Model is a five-year temporary order, which entered full enforcement status at the height of the COVID pandemic. The pandemic severely limited government and civil society efforts to inform and re-train police and criminal justice professionals on the new legal framework.

A 2024 study found that the new law's mass media and public education programs had succeeded in transforming the Israeli public's perceptions of the prostitution industry. While a 2016 survey found that only 39% of Israelis viewed prostituted women as victims of abuse and exploitation, by 2024, 72% of Israelis agreed with this principle, and supported efforts to punish sex buyers.¹ Unfortunately, due to a lack of criminal enforcement of this new law, consumption of prostitution in Israel increased from 7% to 9% during the study period of 2021-2024.² As reported by Israel's Ministry of Justice, only 5,104 fines have been issued to consumers of prostitution since the new law went into effect.³

In 2025, JIJ and our Coalition partners are fighting to make this law permanent. As occurred in 2018 before the law's initial passage, we are facing pressure and harassment from pro-prostitution lobby groups, which seek to reframe prostitution as an act of "empowerment" and mischaracterize the work and membership of the Coalition.

We are also challenged by the prostitution industry's movement away from street corners and onto the internet, including social media platforms like OnlyFans, and encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram, which pimps in Israel use to lure women and girls from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

¹ https://brookdale-web.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/files/RR-009.0-24_Heb_Report.pdf

² <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-809634>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/a-79-322-submission-israel-en.pdf>

Recommendations

During the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the 59th session of the Human Rights Council, we urge you to:

- Call for **civil and criminal penalties** for all who profit from the sexual exploitation of women and girls, whether in person or online;
- Call for UN Women to initiate a **comprehensive survey and data analysis** on the implementation of the abolitionist/equality/Nordic model and its effect on victims and perpetrators;
- Promote the use of precise, **survivor-centered terminology**, including “prostituted women and children” rather than “sex workers,” in UN reports, educational materials, and policy discussions, as recommended in your 2024 Position Paper;
- Call for member states to adopt the following educational programs to change social perceptions of the prostitution industry:
 - Mandatory **educational programs for law enforcement**, social service providers, and judicial authorities on the realities of prostitution, including its ties to human trafficking and organized crime. These programs should align with international human rights principles and survivor-led advocacy;
 - Public education initiatives that **challenge the myths surrounding prostitution** and highlight the realities of coercion, exploitation, and harm. This should include school-based curricula addressing the vulnerability of young women and girls to commercial sexual exploitation;
 - Regulatory measures **requiring digital platforms** (including social media and encrypted messaging services) **to warn users** about the criminal implications of advertising and purchasing sex, and to implement stricter policies against content promoting the exploitation of women and girls;
- **Convene a side event** on *Countering the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls through Prostitution*, gathering representatives of the 8 UN Member States that have adopted the Abolitionist/Equality/Nordic Model (Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Canada, Ireland, France, the Republic of Korea, and Israel) for the purpose of sharing best practices and challenges to implementation.

In support of these recommendations, the Jerusalem Institute of Justice will be happy to participate and facilitate inputs from Israeli survivors, advocates, and service providers.

With appreciation,



Flavia Sevald, CEO