

Head to head: Why the purchase of sex should be a criminal offence

Evidence from around the world shows that legalisation of the trade as a whole fails to protect the most vulnerable

Prostitution exists because there is a demand for it. The sex trade is driven by sex buyers. But the number of women who freely and actively choose to sell sex is low. Hence the gap between demand and supply has always been filled by vulnerable women and girls who have been drawn into prostitution as a result of poverty, childhood abuse or other vulnerabilities, and in the some cases directly coerced or trafficked.

In [Ireland](#) the majority of men never buy sex, but those who do fuel an exploitative trade which is strongly connected to organised crime.

Not criminalising the purchase of sex sends a clear message to men and boys that they are free to pay for sexual access to women's bodies, regardless of the circumstances that brought them into prostitution in the first place. Every year [Ruhama](#) works with more than 300 women in Ireland whose lives have been seriously, and in some cases irreparably, damaged by prostitution.

At its international council meeting in Dublin recently, [Amnesty International](#) rightly recommended that no one who sells sex should be criminalised for doing so. We couldn't agree more: Ruhama has been advocating for the full decriminalisation of women in the sex trade for years.

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