

Prostitution is not a job. The inside of a woman's body is not a workplace

[Julie Bindel](#)

New Zealand has added 'sex work' to its list of skills for migrants, adding to the normalisation of the use of vulnerable women's bodies

'Services helping people to exit "sex work" are irrelevant because who needs support to get out of a regular job?' Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

One of the most persuasive myths about prostitution is that it is "the oldest profession". [Feminist abolitionists](#), who wish to see an end to the sex trade, call it "the oldest oppression" and resist the notion that prostitution is merely "a job like any other".

Now it would appear that the [New Zealand immigration service](#) has added "sex work" (as prostitution is increasingly described) to the list of "employment skills" for those wishing to migrate. According to information on Immigration NZ's (INZ) [website](#), prostitution appears on the "skilled employment" list, but not the "skill shortage" list. My [research](#) on the sex trade has taken me to a number of countries around the world, including New Zealand. Its sex trade was decriminalised in 2003, and has since been hailed by pro-prostitution campaigners as the gold standard model in [regulating prostitution](#).

The promises from the government – that decriminalisation would result in less violence, regular inspections of brothels and no increase of the sex trade – have not materialised. The opposite has happened. Trafficking of women into New Zealand into legal and illegal brothels is a serious problem, and for every licensed brothel there are, on average, four times the number that [operate illegally](#). Violent attacks on women in the brothels are as common as ever. "The men feel even more entitled when the law tells them it is OK to buy us," says [Sabrinna Valisce](#), who was prostituted in New Zealand brothels both before and after decriminalisation. Under legalisation, [women are still murdered by pimps and punters](#).

When prostituted women become "employees", and part of the "labour market", pimps become "managers" and "business entrepreneurs", and the punters are merely clients. Services helping people to exit are irrelevant because who needs support to get out of a regular job? Effectively, governments wash their hands of women under legalisation because, according to the mantra, "It is better than working at McDonald's." As one sex-trade survivor told me, "At least when you work at McDonald's you're not the meat."

If prostitution is work, will states create training programmes for girls to perform the 'best oral sex'

The decision to include prostitution as an "employment skill" is a green light for pimps to populate brothels to meet the increased male demand for the prostitution of the most vulnerable women.

The practice of using human bodies as a marketplace has been normalised under the neoliberal economic system. Supporting the notion that prostitution is “labour” is not a progressive or female-friendly point of view. I have investigated the breast milk trade in Cambodia, where wealthy American businessmen recruit pregnant women and [pay them a pittance for their milk](#). I have seen desperately hungry men outside hospital blood banks in India, offering to sell their blood in exchange for food. Girls in the Ukraine sell “virgin” blonde hair for use as extensions in western salons. It is increasingly common to “rent a womb” from women in the global south to [carry a baby](#) on behalf of privileged westerners.

In the Netherlands, which legalised its sex trade in 2000, it is perfectly legal for driving instructors to [offer lessons in return for sex](#), as long as the learner drivers are over the age of 18.

Under legalisation in Germany, one government-funded NGO, described on its website as a “counselling centre for sex workers”, offers training for women to become “sexual assistant surrogate partnerships” when they decide to leave prostitution. The training focuses on how “sex workers” can help disabled people to explore their sexuality. Providing prostitution services, which is what it is, to men who are ill or disabled is a bit like the “meals on wheels” service, and clearly considered to be a public service. In other legalised regimes, such as [Denmark and Australia](#), prostitution is available for men on the public health system. Perhaps an inevitable conclusion is that carers working with physically disabled couples, where there is a medium to severe level of mobility impairment, are asked to facilitate sex between them – for example, the carer may be expected to insert the penis of one into an orifice of the other.

Any government that allows the decriminalisation of pimping and sex-buying sends a message to its citizens that women are vessels for male sexual consumption. If prostitution is “work”, will states create training programmes for girls to perform the “best oral sex” for sex buyers? Instead of including prostitution as a so-called option in its immigration policies, [New Zealand](#) should investigate the harms, including sexual violence, that women in prostitution endure.

If prostitution is “sex work”, then by its own logic, rape is merely theft. The inside of a woman’s body should never be viewed as a workplace.

- Julie Bindel is a freelance journalist and political activist, and a founder of Justice for Women

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/30/new-zealand-sex-work-prostitution-migrants-julie-bindel>