

10 Things You Need to Know Before You Support the Swedish Model of Sex Work

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We live in a free society where consenting adults are entitled to exercise their sexual freedom in any way they choose. Whether we like it or not, criminalising the buying and selling of sex is an attempt to legislate morality and exercise control over private sexual behaviour. Sex workers are human beings and selling sex is their business. Sex workers must be entitled to the same labour rights as other workers and the same human rights as other people. It is vulnerability, not sex work, which creates victims.

1. The Swedish Model of sex work makes it illegal to buy sexual services, but not to sell them.
2. The model has been adopted by Norway, Iceland and France. Labour MEP Mary Honeyball wants the UK to adopt the same policy, but she has her facts and figures wrong.
3. So wrong that 560 NGOs and civil society organisations, as well as 86 academics and researchers have written to her to voice their objections. They urge other EU member states not to criminalise the purchase of sex.
3. The argument in support of the Swedish model is that attacking the demand to buy sex is a method of reducing the sex industry in general, and trafficking in particular. However there is no credible research to support the idea that the Swedish Model reduces selling, buying or trafficking. There is however, a lot of research to show that the conflation of sex work and trafficking is a conscious attempt to prevent people from voluntarily migrating to do sex work.
4. Instead of improving the situation, a Swedish National Police Board report shows that the policy has driven sex work underground and made sex workers even more vulnerable. It has also lead to an expansion of indoor sex work. For example, Thai massage parlours offering sexual services in the Stockholm area increased from 90 in 2009, to 250 by 2011/2012.
5. Current UK law does need to be reassessed to improve safety for sex workers. In the UK sex workers are forced to work alone, a regulation which dramatically increases the risk of them being subjected to rape, violence and robbery.
6. Four out of five female sex workers in the UK work indoors. Decriminalisation would enable these women to work from premises in teams of two or more which would be safer for them. The same is true for male sex workers.
7. Decriminalising the sale of sex would also empower sex workers to use the justice system to seek redress for abuses and discrimination.
8. Removing the threat of criminal penalties would enable sex workers to work with police, to facilitate the enforcement of anti-trafficking laws.
9. It would also encourage more open access to health, legal and social services.
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10. Sex work challenges current social and cultural norms in the same way that homosexuality, illegitimacy, anal sex and even masturbation once did. We changed the way we thought about those issues and its about time that we changed the way we think about sex work too.

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