

Question 1)

The 2030 Agenda is based on the fundamental principles of human rights, their protection and promotion. Sex work/trade or prostitution cannot be considered in its line.

The protection of the dignity and worth of the human person is recognised as a fundamental principle by the 1948 UDHR. Its Article 4 states that *“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”* and Article 5 states that *“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”*

The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 1949 states that prostitution and trafficking in persons are *“incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person”*, thereby setting the ground for the international community’s approach to prostitution and trafficking.

Article 6 of the CEDAW Convention engages State Parties to the Convention to combat all forms of trafficking in women and the exploitation of the prostitution of women.

Article 2 of the ILO Convention No 29 on forced or compulsory labour, defines forced labour as meaning *“all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily”*.

The Beijing Platform for Action demands measures to address forced prostitution and trafficking in women as severe forms of violence.

These commitments and many others are directly linked to the core UN values of human dignity and leaving nobody behind. Prostitution and sexual exploitation are highly gendered issues and violations of human dignity, contrary to human rights principles, among which gender equality.

It is therefore crucial that all UN bodies respect and embody this language by taking action to eradicate the systems of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

While forced prostitution, as well as human trade that is often behind it, are clearly perceived as human rights violations in line with human rights instruments, including CEDAW article 6, the so-called sex work/trade is sometimes presented as a personal option, an acceptable type of work that should enjoy a status similar to other types of activity regarding rights, social protection, taxes, etc.

We strongly believe there is no such thing as a totally free choice in the selling of one's own body for money and for someone else's enjoyment/exploitation. Prostitution is a form of violence against women- 68 % of prostituted persons suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder - a percentage similar to that of torture victims. There is, certainly, always a direct or indirect motive for entering prostitution - poverty, misery, violence, despair, fear, coercion, even if only psychological... The vast majority of prostitutes come from vulnerable groups. Economic crises, conflicts and environmental disasters are forcing a growing number of women and minors, including refugee and migrant women, to enter prostitution.

Prostitution is a gendered phenomenon: the vast majority of prostituted persons are women and girls, and almost all buyers are men. Prostitution is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, which it aggravates further; prostitution is a violation of women's rights, a form of sexual slavery, perpetuating gender inequality for women.

Prostitution impacts the social perception of the hierarchical power relations between women and men and of their sexuality. It contributes to perpetuate gender stereotypes about women as merchandise available to satisfy male demand for sex and to be used by the "client".

The answer to such problems, if seen in the framework of the Agenda 2030, is certainly not the recognition of sex trade as an acceptable form of work like any other, as the conditions of personal freedom and dignity are not safeguarded and the power imbalance between the ones exploiting and the ones being exploited is not questioned, but accepted as normal.

Question 2)

If the stated objectives are to be achieved, policies on sex work/trade/prostitution have to be seriously evaluated. Prostitution or sex trade will never empower women or make them totally free and autonomous persons.

Serious research, thinking and debate are essential to make clear how negative such realities are for women, even if those involved are not always fully aware of that. Women's NGOs, youth organizations, interested academics, political

parties, together with social organizations working in the field and knowing the “crude reality” of prostitution and sex work have to find positive answers to what is no more than a negative commodification of human persons, their bodies, their will and their dignity.

The aims targeted in the Agenda regarding freedom from violence or trafficking are totally incompatible with the existence of sex work/trade and prostitution, as these realities are intrinsically part of the system that allows it. The normalisation of prostitution has an impact on violence against women since men who buy sex have a degrading image of women and are more likely to commit acts of violence against them. The whole system of prostitution is utterly violent and disempowering.

The existence of several links between prostitution and trafficking is also recognized. Prostitution feeds trafficking for the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women and children and aggravates violence against them. Sex purchasers maintain the demand in this market, leading to its profitability and to the increase in organized crime. An increasing number of young women and minors are forced into prostitution.

Women’s health including their sexual and reproductive health and rights are certainly not respected when their own bodies are used as objects. According to WHO, sexual health *“requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence”*; the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women must be respected, including their right to their bodies and sexuality and to be free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Prostitution also impacts on the health of prostituted persons, who are more likely to suffer from long lasting sexual, physical and mental health traumas, including STDs, drug and alcohol addiction, loss of self-respect and higher mortality rate, than the general population. It can also impact on the health of the sex purchasers.

Work is one of the main sources of human self-realisation, through which individuals make a supportive contribution to collective wellbeing. Prostitution doesn’t fit into this definition. It cannot be perceived as regular job in the sector of services.

Decent work involves opportunities for productive activities and delivers decent income, labour rights, quality jobs, safe and secure working environments and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. Sex trade and prostitution are long lasting forms of slavery. It has been proven that the normalization of prostitution hasn’t succeeded in guaranteeing the prerequisites of decent work.

Peaceful and inclusive societies are not built upon exploitation and humiliation exercised by some persons upon others in a totally unbalanced power relation.

Question 3)

It must be a global, concerted response.

- Legal provisions together with the necessary policies, programmes, means and tools to reduce prostitution and to fight trafficking and sexual exploitation as breaches of women's fundamental rights – in particular with regard to minors – and gender equality: Adoption and strict application of legislation criminalizing those who promote and benefit from sex trade and prostitution, namely pimps and sex buyers, including those who purchase sex abroad.
- Gender-specific prevention strategies by promoting social awareness on the real meaning of such activities, including among men, in particular, among the purchasers and suppliers of sex. Prevention campaigns, namely on the internet, taking into account the vulnerable groups and socially excluded communities targeted by the human trafficking networks.
- Implementation of education on human rights in schools including on gender equality, together with education and awareness-raising of women, starting from school.
- Media involvement in order to address the dissemination of degrading images of women and above all, political commitment to respect, defend and promote human rights.

For those women already caught by such networks, special support policies and programmes should be implemented in close cooperation with the stakeholders in order to leave this practice, including safe houses to allow them the possibility of escaping from the trade and its supporters, as well as legal, psychological and social support, professional training to rebuild their lives and to reintegrate them in society.

These policies and programmes should be combined with supporting and involving all the relevant parties, such as NGOs, the police and other law enforcement agencies; social, medical, immigration and education services in decision-making processes and with promoting work in cooperation. Training should also be addressed to these stakeholders allowing them to understand and to meet the specific needs of various groups of women victims and to work for their empowerment.