

Statement Against the Licensing of Strip Clubs

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I am an expert in the area of women's human rights and non-discrimination against migrant women and girls in Europe. I am also Coordinator of the Network that advocates for the rights and freedom of migrant and refugee women and girls - who are disproportionately affected by sexual exploitation and violence and over-represented in the sex trade across Europe.

I call for an end to the licensing of strip clubs as intrinsically harmful to the women in them. There is considerable evidence that a very large proportion of women in the industry have prior vulnerabilities (including childhood sexual abuse or ongoing domestic violence; mental health concerns; poverty, or the fear of poverty), so greatly influencing the 'choice' to engage in the sex industry.

These vulnerabilities are preyed on by club management and customers. For example, very few clubs (if any) are not a form of *de facto* prostitution - where sexual contact is provided in exchange for money. Very few do not involve copious levels of harassment and assault - verbal, physical and sexual. The resulting trauma simply compounds the trauma already experienced.

Even if sexual contact were not provided and lap dancers were respected in the work environment, it is still deeply harmful to be bought sexually for money - continuously having to feign desire for men (some of whom might repulse you), resulting often in split personas.

The denial of harm by those in the industry is well recognised in clinical terms as a survival mechanism. And this too is harmful.

But the industry doesn't just harm the women working in it. Women repeatedly report feeling unsafe, being harassed or even assaulted in its vicinity, with many self excluding (a breach of their human rights). And it impacts us all by cultivating deeply damaging attitudes in wider society about women's status and function and men's rights and entitlement. This is in a society where 1 in 3 women experience male violence, precisely *because* of men's attitudes.