

**Impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on women affected by prostitution & sex trafficking and recommendations to government**

1. We are extremely concerned that women are still being advertised online by pimps and traffickers and forced to engage with men. The Irish sex trade is largely controlled by criminal gangs who make massive profits from the sexual exploitation of vulnerable, migrant women. They continue to be exposed to exceptional risks and violence, and they are now also unable to protect themselves from contracting coronavirus.

Women under the control of a pimp or trafficker already have little to knowledge of, or access to, services, including health services, as it is. We are concerned that if they now fall ill from the coronavirus they will not be in a position to seek medical attention.

**We recommend that the Gardaí continue to put resources towards operations to investigate organised prostitution at this time so that women under third party control may be discovered and provided with support.**

2. Many of our service-users, including women suspected of being victims of sex trafficking, are housed in Direct Provision centres across the country. Already dealing with exceptional levels of trauma, they are now sharing confined spaces with many others without the possibility of effectively self-isolating to protect them and their families.

**We recommend that the most vulnerable to the virus are moved out of Direct Provision centres to more suitable accommodation for the duration of the crisis, and that they are provided with the care, support and access to services needed.**

3. A number of women in prostitution have taken the decision not to engage with so-called 'sex buyers' for the duration of the crisis. Thus, many now have no access to any alternative income. A driving factor into prostitution for the majority of women is poverty, and without access to a viable alternative, women remain entrenched in the sex trade. Many are also in precarious housing situations and need alternative and emergency accommodation. This is true for women who have a long term plan to exit prostitution, and for those who have decided not to engage in the sex trade right now.

**We recommend that women in prostitution are given access to social welfare and emergency accommodation as a matter of urgency. These are unprecedented times needing emergency measures. For migrant women from the EEA, the Habitual Residency Condition ought to be waived so that they can access social welfare entitlements that many are currently excluded from.**

*Ruhama's services continue to operate throughout this time, and we are available for those affected by prostitution and sex trafficking in any way.*

*For contact details and further information on how our services are operating throughout the pandemic, please visit: <https://www.ruhama.ie/ruhama-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>*