

Ruhama welcomes new initiative for victims of sexual exploitation

Ministerial initiative a crucial step forward in developing exit pathways

Ruhama has today welcomed the initiative by the Minister for Justice to expunge previous convictions for “sale of sex” or prostitution offences. This news is a significant and positive step forward in providing hope to those who have exited or wish to exit the sex trade who have faced barriers to doing so as a result of previous convictions. While the sellers of sexual services in Ireland have been fully decriminalised since the introduction of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, those with historical convictions have faced challenges in access to education, employment and other opportunities as a direct result of historic convictions. Today’s initiative is an important step towards improving the lives of those with historical convictions and ensuring the important legal presumption of the full decriminalisation of those selling sexual services applies universally.

Speaking following the announcement today, Ruhama CEO, Barbara Condon commented, “this initiative is a crucial step forward in the provision of exit pathways for victims of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. The full decriminalisation of those selling sexual services is a vital component of the 2017 legislation and it is encouraging to see the minister applying this presumption of decriminalisation to historic convictions. This move will undoubtedly bring hope to women who wish to exit the sex trade and have faced barriers to doing so as a result of previous convictions.”

Previous convictions can be a significant obstacle for women who wish to exit the sex trade and move on with their lives. Opportunities in employment and education can be closed off to victims where previous convictions exist for them. For those wishing to exit the sex trade, opportunities in education and employment are crucial to ensuring that these individuals are not re-victimised on the basis of being denied those opportunities because of previous convictions.

Barbara Condon continued, “where exit pathways are denied to victims of sexual exploitation, their capacity to exit where they so choose is extremely limited. We know from the experiences of our service users that the decision to exit the sex trade can be very complex and multi-faceted and the accessibility of employment opportunities to support themselves and their families is fundamentally important. Today’s move provides hope to those individuals that pathways to education and employment that were previously closed to them will soon be opened up.”

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About Ruhama

Ruhama is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a registered charity, which works on a nationwide basis with women, including transgender women, affected by prostitution and sex trafficking. Ruhama offers free and confidential support and assistance to women who:

- Are actively involved in prostitution
- Are seeking to exit (leave) prostitution
- Are victims of sex trafficking
- Have a past experience of prostitution/sex trafficking.

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