



**DESIRE**  
Demand  
for Sexual  
Exploitation  
In Europe

**DESIRE** is a project that has received funding from the European Union's Internal Security Fund Police (2014-2020) under grant agreement no. **4000008408**. Additional information about the project and the consortium can be found at [www.project-desire.eu](http://www.project-desire.eu).

## Deliverable No. 3: Croatia- Results from qualitative interviews

<b>Project acronym</b>	DESIRE
<b>Project title</b>	Demand for Sexual Exploitation in Europe
<b>Grant number</b>	4000008408
<b>Start date of project</b>	02 January 2017
<b>Duration</b>	24 months
<b>Contractual delivery date</b>	
<b>Actual delivery date</b>	16 June 2018
<b>Lead beneficiary</b>	
<b>Contributing beneficiary</b>	FLIGHT
<b>Dissemination level</b>	Public
<b>Version</b>	[0.1]
<b>Abstract</b> [insert abstract here]	



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## Change Records

Issue	Author	Date	Reason for change
0.1	Ana Opačić, Iva Jovović, Marko Miklin, Denis Ježdik and Hana Kutil	16 June 2018	First draft

Chapter	Main Authors Responsible	Contributors
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## Acronyms

A-Z	Acronym	Meaning
D	DESIRE DoA	Demand for Sexual Exploitation In Europe Description of Action
E	ERG	Expert Reflection Group
F	FLIGHT	FLIGHT, NGO
T	THB TiU	Trafficking in human beings Tilburg University
U	UU UW	University of Uppsala University of Warsaw
V	VUB	Vrije Universiteit Brussels
W	WP	Work Package

*[Modify according to needs]*

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## 1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW(EE)S

### 1.1. SAMPLE

Qualitative research included 15 sex workers (all female), 30 buyers (all male) and 30 representatives of different stakeholders: policy makers, law enforcement, NGO.

#### 1.1.1. AGE AND SEX STRUCTURE

Table 1. Participants in the sample by age/sex

	14-17		18-30		31-40		41-50		51-65		65+	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
SEX WORKER				2		5		6		2		
BUYER			4		11		11		4			
POLICY-NGO-LAW ENFORCERS			2	1	3	5	7	5	4	2		

All sex workers in this sample are female, mainly in age groups 31-40 years (33%) and 41-50 years (40%).

As it could be expected, buyers were all male, mostly in age groups 31-40 and 41 -50 years (73%) and with the same number of respondents younger than 30 and older than 51 year. Same is for P-N-L group where most of respondents are in group age 31-40 years (27%) and 41-50 years (40%).

#### 1.1.2. Additional information about sex workers

Sex workers in this survey (N= 15) are quite different with various life experiences. Some of them are from capital of Croatia Zagreb (4), while some have moved from other parts of Croatia (3) or from ex- Yugoslavia countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia (4) having experience as a refugee during war in the 90s.

Their education background varies, but mostly they have finished secondary school and 2 of them are students now. 5 sex workers have children, and 2 are married or live with a partner. 4 sex workers are employed in other branches. Some of sex workers

have faced difficult life events, such as family violence, poverty living in social assistance, having a spouse or a child with disability, living without parental care in social care homes. Two sex workers have been sentenced for prison time or probation, and two have history of drug or alcohol addiction.

When it comes to the sex workers' pathways to sex industry, money played crucial role since most of them (10) have found themselves in poverty without possibility to get a job or without a job that gives them an opportunity to take care for the children. One specifically needed a money to buy drugs, and one had no place to stay after residential care or moving away from violent partner. Persuasion of a close person also played a role (6), either a friend that was already in a business (5) or a partner (1).

Only two sex workers made independently decision to start with sex work after having various sexual experiences, and only two sex workers found themselves within organised sex industry after visiting a party or applying for an add in modelling business.

Today, for 12 respondents sex work is the key source of income, and for 3 is an additional source.

### ***1.1.3. Information about job/education of the buyers***

Regarding buyers' education and professional background, they differ among themselves, but app 30% are those with vocational school (N= 12) in fields such as construction work, ceramics, auto mechanics, driver. Several respondents belong to service sector, primarily commerce and catering (N= 7). Other professionals with possibly higher graduate level are somewhat rare, such as experts in IT sector (2), experts in administration (2), education (1), health (1), economy (1). Three respondents are not employed being in study, retired or only sporadically employed.

Most of respondents (50%) have been for quite a long time active on a labour market, more than 15 years and this coincides with their age: 8 of them are employed up to 10 years, 5 between 11 and 15 years; 8 are employed more than 16, and less than 20 years and 7 are in employment for more than 7 years,

Buyer had a specific motivation to stress some aspects regarding their work and in this matter, they were polarised in two groups. 7 of them wanted to stress their job as

positive, satisfying, valuable and interesting. Other 7 respondents on the opposite site have stressed how their job is hard work, stressful, they feel degraded in the society, feel unprofessionalism and that their job is monotonous.

**1.1.4. Information about policy makers, law enforcers and NGO representatives**

Survey included 30 representatives of different stakeholders: 10 representatives of policy makers, 10 representatives of law enforcement, and 10 representatives of civil society organization. Respondents are experienced in their field practice having in average 20.62 years of professional experience. Structure of their job placement is as follows (Table 2).

Table 2. Structure of the stakeholders' sample

Group	Sector	position
Policy makers	Ministry of Justice: 4 Health: 2 Governmental body: 2 Social welfare: 2	Head of the department: 7 Professional worker: 3
Law enforcement	Ministry of the Interior-police department - 10	Head of the department: 3 Policemen: 7
NGO representatives	Different vulnerable groups and counselling: 5 Family violence issues: 2 Youth work: 1 Human rights organisation: 1 Work with prisoners: 1	

**1.2. Reaching initial sample design and conducting interviews**

Realised sample has reached planned design in all respondents' categories, except for category of victims of human category due to small proportion in the population, invisibility of the problem and the fact that most of time victims are in transit.

Interviews were conducted during end of March, April and May of 2018., all on Croatian language with the presence of interviewer and respondent, in the open public space,

private place and office of the respondent. Interviews were not recorded, and in every group respondents showed more or less unwillingness to be recorded due to sensitive and controversial topic. Interviews with sex workers were conducted with the duration 25 to 60 minutes, and average duration was 43 minutes. Interviews with buyer were the shortest, respondents were not very opened, and interviews lasted 10 to 30 minutes (average duration was 21 minutes). Interviews with stakeholders' representatives were lasting between 20 minutes and one hour with average duration of 36 minutes.

## 2. SEW WORK

### 2.1. Interviewees' attitudes towards sex work and prostitution

Sex workers' associations towards sex work and prostitution are mostly connected with economic viewpoint: *"Selling for money... a way out...if it doesn't exist, I don't know how I would survive"*<sup>1</sup>. For 13 respondents (87%) sex work is connected with money transaction that happens between buyer and provider, and in an addition it is perceived as a job, or even survival strategy that helps in overcoming current deprivation.

5 respondents (30%) perceive sex work in behavioural approach as something that is widely connected with sexuality and sexual behaviour including also pornography or sexual intercourse. 6 respondents (40%) find sex work and prostitution as synonymous words, but they stress that sex work is more appropriate and implies legality, while prostitution implies something lower and criminalised. Only one respondent referred to prostitution as terms that evokes disgust and negative personal relation.

When thinking about associations and meanings that both words evoke, buyers primarily have stressed economic dimension of the phenomenon, followed by social dimension and finally sexuality position (Table 3). 6 respondents see these words as synonymous.

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<sup>1</sup> " Prodavanje za novac i kažem...izlaz iz situacije. Na žalost da nije toga ne znam kako bih preživjela." (Sex worker, 13).

Table 3: Buyers' associations and meanings towards sex work and prostitution

ASSOCIATIONS REGARDING PROSTITUTION	N	ASSOCIATIONS REGARDING SEX WORK	N
<b>ECONOMIC POSITION</b>			
Economic exchange of sexual services for money	11	Economic exchange of sexual services for money	4
Concept "business as usual" with supply-demand logic	2	Concept "business as usual"	2
Strategy for material survival and fulfilment of economic needs	2	"Easy money"	1
		Business that not everyone can be good at	1
<b>SOCIAL POSITION</b>			
Social phenomenon: the oldest profession	4	Legalised and destigmatized prostitution (both for service providers and buyers)	6
Gender perspective: perceived as female occupation	3	Protection	1
Social taboo and mystery	3	Social taboo and lack of knowledge	2
Pejorative term "hooker"	1	Being "Sugar baby"	1
<b>SEXUALITY POSITION</b>			
Sex as behaviour	2	Sex as behaviour	3
Fulfilment of sexual fantasies	1	Work related with sexuality: striptease, pornography	2
Intimate relation	1	Sexual therapy	1
		Heterosexual intercourse	1
		Excitement, pleasure, satisfaction	3

As we can notice, economic stance is quite visible in term prostitution, rather than social response or behavioural aspect including sexuality. Sexuality is evident aspect,

but involving money, trade or even economic exchange is crucial. Same is transferred to the association with the word *sex work*, but *sex work* also brings connotations as legalised and even socially approved activity. From the social position, both words are connected with phenomenon that is familiar to human society from the ancient times, but was always provoking and challenging. As it is mentioned, term *sex work* is connected with prospects of legalisation and possibly change of dominant social attitudes. Here is important to note that some buyers reflect the idea that legalisation of *sex work* could also contribute to their own destigmatization: "You come in as gentlemen, do your work and pay."<sup>2</sup> Sexuality positions is less visible, but few buyers connect prostitution or *sex work* with obvious sexual behaviour, every activity referring to sexuality and affective component of excitement, pleasure and satisfaction.

Representatives of different stakeholders are more consistent in their association towards prostitution/*sex work*. Mostly they believe that it is a same concept (N= 19; 63%), but *sex work* is "nicer term", and more neutral (N= 13; 43%), while prostitution becomes pejorative and has negative associations. From some additional aspects, 12 respondents (40%) see it in economic sense, i.e. economic exchange of services and money/goods. One respondent points that term holds presumption of sex worker's free will.

Sex workers primarily see public attitude as hypocrite (N= 8; 53%) referring to their customers that demonstrate different values in family and social surrounding from those when they buy sex services. Some of them (4) connect this hypocrisy with general social hypocrisy characteristic for the national or regional "Balkan" context. 4 respondents feel that legal status where prostitution is criminalised demonstrates enough social attitudes, but also refer to their own stigmatized position feeling that others see them as unmoral person, give them no rights and treat as an unworthy person in criminal justice system. Two respondents detect certain ambivalence in the society and there is indeed growing public debate on how to approach to (de)criminalisation of the prostitution. Related to that note, 11 respondents (73%) hasn't share with their surrounding what they are doing for living, while 4 has shared, mostly with close people. 10 (66%) respondents feel that society is judgmental towards

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<sup>2</sup> "Gospodski dođeš, obaviš posao i platiš." (Buyer, 29).

them, 5 doesn't have this experience, either because people have understanding or do not even know what they are doing.

Buyers mostly recognise dominant public attitudes in society as simply negative and disapproving (N= 14). Specifically, they address several positions in public attitudes: judgmental (5), ignorant (5), criminalizing approach (5) and hypocrite (2). There is notion that public attitudes could be ambivalent (N= 3) following that in public debates people are divided over legalisation, but also improving legalisation of sexual work doesn't imply acceptance of such behaviour.

From different stakeholders' point of view, public attitude is mostly negative, but by that they specifically meant following:

- a) hypocrisy in a sense that there is discrepancy between opinion and the real behaviour (N= 7; 23%)
- b) repressive, it should be sanctioned or eliminated (N= 7; 23%)
- c) ignorant - it is something that doesn't exist and there is no will to deal with it (N= 5, 17%)

Several respondents believe that there is tolerant attitude (possibly because there are no constant sanctions) or some sort of public ambivalence. In general, almost all our respondents think that sex workers are stigmatized in the society (N= 27 or 90%), but furthermore this stigma doesn't prevent people to engage in sex industry (N= 24 or 80%) since, as one respondent states *"Unfortunately no because stigma of poverty is stronger"*<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to observe differences in perception if sex work/prostitution is private or personal matter. Policy makers and NGO representatives perceive it as personal (both groups 80%), while law enforcement professionals see it as public matter (60%) or conditionally private (in cases of violence, work at the street and lack of protection it becomes public) (30%).

When it comes to their own personal attitude, sex workers again apostrophe it as a strategy for surviving (N= 11, 73%), as a way to pay the bills, as their job that provides food on a table, as a hard job, even as a "necessary evil". 4 respondents stressed out burdens that they face, fact that is physically and psychically demanding and a sense

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<sup>3</sup> " Na žalost ne, jer je stigma siromaštva jača" (IVA-8).

that everyone is against you: *"This is the hardest job on the world. Who hasn't tried it, doesn't know. Police is against you, neighbours, clients, procurers. Everyone. Prices are constantly falling down; young and good looking are coming. You have to hold out this all."*<sup>4</sup>. One could sense a feeling of un-protection and as if sex workers are left behind on their own. 4 respondents have also point necessity to legalise sex work, but to limit work of procurers and agents.

Buyers' personal attitude is different than general public's and majority simply notes positive attitude (N= 12). More specifically, some stress sex work as socially useful, necessary and even helping activity (N= 5) and that should be legalised (N= 4). 2 respondents place accent on importance of sex work as activity based on consent and personal choices avoiding any connection with coercion. Other perspectives are understanding towards sex workers and stressing benefits from having sexual relation without any emotional commitment: *"For many unhappy people it is like a valve. Benefit is mutual"*<sup>5</sup>. Only three respondents feel that sex work is not a good option for people that are providing sexual services, that will be always illegal because of the financial benefits and that they are hiding the fact of buying sexual services.

There are two main reasons why buyers are engaged in sex work. First one is hedonistic approach (N= 13) and buyers are motivated by sense of fun, pleasure, satisfaction, fulfilment of sexual desires, excitement and curiosity. The other one is compensatory approach (N= 16) and buyers are motivated by the fact that they are single and have no partner, that have low success in field of intimate relationships, compensate disrupted marital relations, have no time or desire for emotional commitment and see sex work even as becoming a sort of intimate relation while spending private time together.

Personal attitudes among different stakeholders are different, but in general, NGO representatives have more positive attitudes both towards sex workers and buyers, while law enforcement officers are more negative or strict (Table 4).

Table 4. Stakeholders' attitudes towards sex work

<sup>4</sup> "To je najteži posao na svijetu. Tko nije probao, ne zna. Protiv tebe je policija, susjedi, klijenti, makroi. Svi. Stalno padaju cijene, dolaze mlade i zgodne. Tu moraš moći sve izdržati." (Seks worker, 13).

<sup>5</sup> "Mislim da dođe kao ventil mnogim nesretnim ljudima. Korist je obostrana." (Buyer 16).

	POLICY MAKERS	LAW ENFORCEMENT	NGO
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEX WORK	Positive with presumption of free will – 60%	Positive with presumption of free will – 20%	Positive with presumption of free will – 90%
	it's not appropriate – 20%	it should be sanctioned and eliminated – 60%	It should be eliminated or decreased – 20%
	It is inevitable – 30%	It is inevitable – 10%	
	sex workers need support – 20%		
Do adults have a right to choose to become a sex worker?	YES – 80%	YES – 30%	YES – 90%
	NO – 20%	NO – 50%	NO – 10%
Should buyers be allowed to get sex services?	YES – 80%	YES – 30%	YES – 90%
	NO – 20%	NO – 40%	NO – 10%
		No reply – 30%	

In general, both policy makers and NGO representatives are more supportive towards sex work if it is based on a free will. When it comes to buyers, policy makers mostly feel that they are people with needs whose behaviour is justified (70%), and NGO representatives mostly believe that they have a right for using sex workers' services (70%). Law enforcement officers are divided in viewing them as people with needs and offenders. This is consistent with their opinion if buyers should be allowed to get sex services.

## 2.2. Opinions towards actions to protect/secure sex workers

Sex workers are aware and faced with many risks in their job, and thus 80% of them (12) feels certain fear of concern about themselves.

Majority of their fear is connected with physical and financial safety. They are afraid of violent clients (N= 8; 53%) that sometime do not want to pay; and they are also afraid of poverty, especially in their later times. They are aware that sex work is not lifelong solution and 8 respondents (53%) showed concern about lack of money, lack of perspective and lack of solution for their retirement age: *" I am afraid because of everything: of someone recognises me, of violent clients, of other sex workers because relations are disastrous. Of getting old, sickness..."*<sup>6</sup> .

Other sources of their concern is disease (3) prison (1), fear that someone would recognise them (1), fear from other sex workers (1) and unwillingness to continue with sex work in certain situations (1).

It is significant to mention that all respondents (100%) said that they have some concern about their health. These worries are connected with having no health insurance, feeling shame in front of medical staff, having other physical diseases and having mental health problems connected with lack of perspective, anxiety and hostility toward their job. 13 sex workers in the sample have health insurance, but among them 3 are thinking on private coverage that is in Croatia equivalent as not having health insurance. This means that 10 sex worker has medical insurance, but 5 doesn't have one.

Other reasons for their concern is connected to safety risks their face practically on a daily basis. Sex workers recognise following risks related to their work:

- Violent clients (N= 10)
- Risks of sexually transmitted diseases (N= 7)
- Risks of police intervention (N= 4)
- Clients under the influence of alcohols and drugs (N= 3)
- Clients unwilling to pay (N= 3)

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<sup>6</sup> "Uplašena sam od svega: od toga da me netko poznati ne vidi i ne prepozna, od nasilnih klijenata, od drugih seksualnih radnica jer su odnosi katastrofalni među nama. Od starosti, bolesti...itd." (Sex worker, 9).

- Exposure to shame and risk of revealing what person is doing (N= 3) (e.g. clients want to take sex video, risk that someone familiar could stop on the street, etc.)

Even though all sex workers (N= 15) believe that they can refuse to provide certain sex services and that they are not often in the situation where they need to refuse something (N= 10 or 67% says these situations are not often, and for 5 or 33% they happen often), 14 out of 15 sex workers in our sample were at least once in the situation when they couldn't refuse to do something that they didn't wanted to. In final stance, sex workers are divided about their freedom to exit sex work. 6 (40%) believes that she can quit sex work any time and 9 (60%) feels that they cannot quit the sex work. However, it has no connection with coercion from someone else, but it is existential reason and with sense that sex work is their survival strategy.

There is no doubt that sex workers carry numerous burdens on their shoulders and that further protection is necessary. Almost every interviewed stakeholder's representative (29 out of 30) also believes that sex work has long-term consequences, primarily in health, and also that sex workers only partially experience fulfilled promises given by their agents or procurers (this is opinion shared by 28 out of 30 stakeholders' representatives).

So far, we can identify three approaches among our respondents - sex workers in dealing with issues that concern them: preventive (N= 6), proactive (N= 2) and passive (N= 9). As a way of preventing unfortunate outcomes, sex workers made a collaboration with a procurer to avoid violent clients, are trying to make some savings, take preventive care about their body, try to take caution in meeting new clients and avoid unfamiliar clients. Active approach means that sex workers are trying to calm down violent situations or threat to call the police. However, most of the time they are passive trying to avoid or draw back from negative situation or try not to think about their worries, do not handle them or take pills to calm down.

Procurers and agents are sometimes perceived as a means for protection, but according to our respondents, they are perceived predominately negative and dangerous. Today all sex workers work without an agent or procurer, even though 5

(33%) had previous experience. Some of it was negative with procurer being violent and using blackmail methods, while some positive and partnering.

In general, 5 respondents have indifferent opinion (53%), 2 has positive experience, but other sex workers see them negative. They are perceived as a "parasites" by 7 respondents meaning that without an effort or contribution simply take over significant share of their earnings. Some even point that they keep a person imprisoned or attached to themselves with fictive debts (3) as if you have signed "a contract with the devil": *"They are all fraud. You can turn out bad only with them. First, they approach you with promises, buy you a wardrobe, self-phones, and later ask you to return money for all, and accuse you for stealing from them. If you become worse at what you do, they become violent and then the real hell begins with them"*<sup>7</sup>.

. Other comments are that they may be violent (2), that is much easier to deceive younger sex workers, that they usually get away from the police, unlike sex workers, and that they bring more damage representing the worst aspect of their work.

In general, different from previous two groups, we might say that stakeholders' representatives are in great extent ambivalent about procurers, with the exception of law enforcement professionals. They mostly believe that attitude towards procurers depend on if they have a role of protector or do sexual exploitation (70% of policy makers and 60% of NGO representatives). Law enforcement respondents mostly perceives them as offenders that should be sanctioned (60%). Furthermore, between a vision of procurers and agents as criminals Vs. entrepreneurs, 50% of policy makers and 50% of NGO representatives are ambivalent, while 8 out of 10 law enforcement respondents see them as criminals. In general, in the sample of stakeholders, procurers and agents are more often perceived as criminals (50%), and only 17% (N= 5) as entrepreneurs. It is also interesting to observe how stakeholders' representatives differ in their opinion if sex work would increase if procurers are not involved. In general, 37% feels that it would decrease (N= 11), and this is mostly in policy makers group (7 out of 10 feels this way). 47% believes that it wouldn't make a difference (N= 14) and

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<sup>7</sup> "Oni su sve prevara. S njima možeš jedino loše proći. Prvo se umiljavaju curama s obećanjima, kupovinom garderobe, mobitelima, a poslije te traže da im vratiš novac za sve to i optuže te da ih potkradaš. Ako se pokvariš, postanu nasilni i onda počinje pravi pakao s njima." (Seks worker, 9).

this opinion prevails in law enforcement group (7 out of 10 shares this point). 5 respondents do not have clear idea.

There is a necessity for public institutions to step in and provide a protection. But, when it comes to trust towards public institutions, situation is not promising. They are divided towards belief if government can actually do something. 8 or 53% believes that it can, while 7 or 47% that cannot. Situations is similar when it comes to civil society organizations: 6 or 40% trusts them, while 9 or 60% doesn't have trust in NGOs. Trust in the police is lowest and only 2 respondents trusts them, while 13 or 87% doesn't. Same ratio doesn't believe that these actors could help them if they would like to quit sex work.

However, in case if there is an emergency, 8 respondents (53%) would come to the police for the protection, 5 (33%) definitely wouldn't and 2 (13%) are ambivalent. 5 respondents feel that police are an option in an extreme situation when life is in direct danger, and one has such experience. Most of them (10 out of 15) also feel that police brings more damage than support and are afraid of their prosecution. One respondent shared an experience that policeman intimidated her to tell everything to her family about what she is doing.

Reasons for their trust lies in perception that public institutions have power and means for providing employment, housing, advice and protection. Reasons for lack of trust is basically lack of trust in general in Croatian institutions believing that on the one side corruption, dishonesty and nepotism are dominant paradigms; or that Croatian institutions are in general powerless and have no resources to help in different situations.

Sex workers expect legalisation as a source of protection (N= 6; 40%), and further connected with this pension insurance (4), health insurance (3), legal protection (2), release of the police pressure (4) but also physical protection (2) and protection from the organised criminal involving sex work (2). From civil society organisations, they expect health support and preventing STDs (2) and additional educations about their rights (2).

In general, buyers are in favour of sex workers and increased protection for them. They all agree that sex workers have right to protection, and have awareness that right for protection is universal human right: *"We are all humans regardless of what we do for*

*a living.*"<sup>8</sup>. App 30% of respondents (N= 13) feel that legalisation would have protective effect with positive comparative examples applied. Only one respondent feels that legalisation is not real solution. When thinking about possible sources of protection, 6 respondents name police, 5 mention government and 2 mention possibility of private bodyguard. Protection should be secured in field of health protection (N= 3), labour rights (N= 3), protection in relation toward procurer (N= 1) and physical safety (N= 1). Here when buyer mentioned labour rights, they practically referred to them similar to receiving a status of the citizen. In Croatia being in employment is not solely way of making for living, but is also considered as being recognised, included in the society and holding numerous social rights connected with employment status.

It is interesting that 3 respondents feel nihilistic and that, regardless of sex workers' right, protection will never be accomplished since society will never be tolerant nor sex workers accepted in the society.

Representatives of other stakeholders are aware that sex workers are vulnerable to violence (all respondents believe that) and risks increases either at the end of sexual relation during payment (N= 14 or 47%) or there is no strict rule and risk happens during whole process (N= 13 or 43%). Representatives of other stakeholder have different ideas about how government can help in general to sex workers' protection. While policy makers and NGO representatives feel that legalisation or decriminalisation would help (60%), law enforcement officers think that sanctions towards sex worker or buyer and decrease of sex work is a way (60%). Other useful measures would be health protection and prevention of sexual transmitted diseases, allowing places where sex workers could work organized out of the streets or developing drop in centres for psychosocial support. More concretely, stakeholders are in general more pro than against legalisation with all working rights aside (pension, health, tax obligation). 67% or 20 out of 30 respondents is pro legalisation, mostly respondents from policy makers' group (8 out of 10) and NGO group (9 out of 10). Law enforcement respondents are mostly against (7 out of 10).

Some of them, mostly law enforcement officers, had personal experience in their work with sex workers' victims or even offenders (N= 14 or 47%). 9 respondents or 30%

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<sup>8</sup> "Svi smo mi ljudi bez obzira čime se tko bavi" (Buyer, 11).

arguments their opinion in the idea that sex workers are in oppressed, vulnerable and powerless position. Specifically, regarding protection against violence, there are two dominant approaches that respondents pointed to: legalisation/regulation and more repressive approach. Regulation means decriminalisation and possibility to introduce public houses for sex work or safe zones. Repressive approach includes stronger police surveillance, higher penalties for buyers or elimination of sex work. While policy makers (90%) and NGO representatives (80%) are more in favour of regulation approach, law enforcement officers are divided between these two approaches. Additionally, 80% of policy makers and 90% of NGO representatives are in favour of safe zones and places, while this idea is supported only by 30% of law enforcement professionals. According to our respondents, these places would not contribute only to safety, but also to more effective surveillance, public order, less violence, support for possible victims and is in line with "good western practices". It is interesting that respondents do not give a clear idea if increased sense of safety would lead to more sex work. There are no major differences among our three groups of stakeholders, but in general 47% (N= 14) believe that it would and 50% (N= 15) that it wouldn't.

Regardless of any other opinion about police and criminal justice system, our stakeholders demonstrate in certain extent trust towards police. 9 out of 10 law enforcement officers are ready to interfere if they find out that sex worker is victim of violence, while this is the case with 4 out of 10 policy makers and 6 out of 10 NGO representatives. For most of our respondents (18 out of 19 that would interfere) this involvement means calling the police. 73% of respondents (N= 23) also feel that victims can freely report violence to the police, with the exception that NGO representatives are more suspicious, and only 4 out of 10 NGO respondents agree with this. Reasons for lower trust in the police is fear of stigma or fear of their prosecution of sex worker, but also argument that even in the police there are employed people who work as a procurer.

They see police and criminal justice system as one that can provide protection towards victims of violence (N= 15 or 50%), but also put an accent on the approach that is not judgmental, it is professional, demonstrates understanding and tolerance, it is fair and empathic (this is particularly important by NGO representatives). At the moment support towards sex workers - victims of violence is mostly provided by NGOs (N= 20

or 67%), in shelters for violence victims (N= 8 or 27%), by the providers of free legal assistance (N= 5 or 17%) and the medical staff (N= 4). Several (N= 6) respondents stress out that there are few support providers and insufficient on a national level. Finally, all stakeholders' representatives (N= 30) think that public institutions can help a person to exit sex work and most of them (N= 28 out of 30) would give a contribution as a citizen if sex worker asks him. The most important strategy for support from public institutions would be providing a new employment opportunity (N= 18 or 60%), followed by providing housing (N= 8), financial assistance (N= 6) and health care (N= 2). Respondents also find important inclusion into support provided by civil society organisations (N= 7). If they are asked as citizens or professionals to help a sex worker, they could provide inclusion into civil society organisation or psychosocial support (N= 10; 33%), financial assistance (N= 9; 30%) or police protection (N= 5; 17%) or appointing to social welfare centre, bureau for employment and providing an accommodation in the shelter.

### **2.3. New forms and trends in the sex industry**

According to our respondents, sex industry in Croatia is quite conservative using not so many new strategies in communication between buyers and providers. Sex workers mostly rely on making contact with familiar buyers (N= 7; 47%) or using recommendations from someone they trust in (N= 7; 47%). This personal contact is also preferred way since level of trust is increased, and this seem to be very important for them. Other strategies are phone (5) or online contact (4), using ads (4) or communicate directly on the street (5). Only one respondent meets client in her massage saloon or over the procurer (2).

Taking from the buyers' point of view, there are no significant changes in way of meeting and communicating with sex workers. They mostly feel that other buyers rely on familiar person's recommendations (N= 9), use ads (N= 6) or visit sex workers on places familiar for such encounters (N= 2). Most of them are not familiar with any new approaches. In their personal experience, they mostly used ads (N= 13), Internet (N= 8), familiar locations (N= 8) or personal recommendations (N= 2).

Stakeholders' representatives also didn't point much on new trends, except those connected with tourism and sex work that happens in the hotels, resorts or yachts. As they see it, sex work happens in following locations:

- In private apartments (N= 17 or 57%)
- In the hotels, resorts (N= 11 or 37%)
- On the parking lots or gas stations (N= 3)
- In the striptease clubs (N= 2)

Buyers and sex workers usually meet:

- On the street (N= 12 or 40%)
- Over the ads (N= 7 or 23%)

Most of stakeholders' representatives do not find connection between pornography and sex work (N= 17) while those that find it mostly refer to the idea that pornography is a source of motivation to reach sex work (N= 10 or 30%) since it *"boosts someone's imagination"*.

### **3. Sexual exploitation and human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation**

Sex workers have dominantly three different associations on sexual exploitation:

- a) Coercion on sex (N= 6)
- b) Economic exploitation of sexual service providers by procurers or others (N= 6)
- c) Violence and abuse (involving rape, paedophilia, using minors for sexual activities or mentally ill people) (N= 6)

Two sex workers clearly wanted to state that they are not related to sexual exploitation, and three equalised it with trafficking and slavery.

Both sexual exploitation and human trafficking evokes clearly negative association in buyers' sample.

For 30% of buyers, sexual exploitation means coercion (N= 9) but without any or full access to earnings from the sexual activity (N= 8). In short it would also mean economic exploitation.

For some of respondents, it includes power imbalances (N= 3) with established relations of dominance and oppression. Sexual exploitation is perceived by 7 respondents as organised criminal activity with inclusion of procurer (N= 4), being criminal offence (N= 2) and having not one, but group of victims (N= 1). 3 respondents recognise violation of human rights (N=2) noting that sexual exploitation is something that should be punished, and 4 respondents connect it with usage of violence (abuse and rape). Here for some respondents, sexual exploitation has gender perspective involving women (N= 4).

Stakeholders' representatives shared their ideas on sexual exploitation more in detail. Their associations and professional experience-based descriptions are mostly oriented around the idea of coercion and involuntarily being engaged in sexual activities (N= 17, or 57%). More concretely, some of them equalised sexual exploitation with rape (N= 7), usage of all sorts of aggression (N= 5) and including someone into prostitution (N= 5). Only 3 respondents connected it with wide range of behaviours from "the lighter ones" such as exposing someone to watch sexual activities to most severe ones. Respondents further recognise two dominant criterions when sex workers can be considered as victim of sexual exploitation:

- a) using force or coercion and engaging person in sexual activity against her own will (N= 16 or 53%)
- b) taking away earned money in sex work (N= 10 or 33%).

Other criterions were experiencing rape (N= 6) and being exposed to someone's aggression (N= 5). Lack of free will is a criterion that they would also use to differ regular sex workers and those that were forced to sex work, even though for most of them (N= 17 or 57%) it is difficult to notice the distinction.

Particularly vulnerable groups from their point are women (N= 14; 47%) which again confirms strong gender perspective in this matter. Three age groups are vulnerable: children (N= 4), young people (N= 5) and elderlies (N= 3). Also, victim may be any person that is infirm, desperate, poor or less educated (N= 6). Specific social risks factors for sexual exploitation are mostly socio-economic and respondents see sexual exploitation as social problem. It is increased due to

- poverty (N= 16; 53%)

- unemployment or low salaries (N= 8) and increased indebtedness in the population (N= 2)
- Political and institutional crisis (N= 4)

Respondents also mentioned migrations as risk factor (N=2) and only several of them connected it to individual risk factors, such as low self-esteem, lack of knowledge and information or sense of powerlessness.

Combining risk factors with the idea what sexual exploitation is, respondents are describing their strategy mostly as combination of rewards and punishments or a having "*a bait strategy*". They use as baits promises about better future, jobs, earnings (N = 9) or at first provide financial or material resources (N= 15; 50%). After this, it follows a period of coercion and threats (N= 15; 50%) with an addition of violence, imprisonment or abduction. Sometimes, close family member or partner might be involved.

When it comes to trafficking, respondents associate it with following aspects (Table 5).

Table 5. Associations towards trafficking

	BUYERS' associations	N (Total 30)	SEX WORKERS' association	N (Total 15)	Stakeholders	N (Total 30)
Forms of interaction	Slavery	5	Slavery	4		
	Violence	7			Violence	2
	Imprisonment	3			Imprisonment	5
	Deception of the victims	3	Deception of the victims	1	Deception of the victims	1
	Kidnapping	1	Kidnapping	1	Kidnapping	1
Victims	Women	4			women	1
	Children	1	Children	1	migrants	2
Organization	Criminal organization	9	Criminal organization	2	Criminal organization	1
	Demand and supply	7	Demand and supply	5	Demand and supply	2
	Purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution	9	Purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution	1	Purpose of different work exploitation	11
	International perspective	4	International perspective	2	International perspective	2
OTHER			Fiction – not existing in this surrounding	4	Moral horror and tragedy	7

In the table we could notice that buyers mostly referred to trafficking as a form of organised criminal activity with its structural international frame and even global social problem and phenomenon. In certain extent it is again connected with gender perspective and in interaction between victim and offender violence is important aspect as well as denial of free will and freedom. Similar is sex workers' point who connect trafficking with economic relation, slavery, but what is interested several (N= 4) says it is a "movie story" or a fiction, and that it doesn't exist in our social setting (N= 3). Only 2 sex workers in our sample have met a person victim of the trafficking, and mostly they do not talk about it (N= 12; 80%). There are some indications that Roma population or specifically Roma children and women might be victims of trafficking, but is often left behind in frame of "their culture", and mostly happening in domestic context. This is a topic that would need deeper analysis. Third group of our respondents connects trafficking mostly with different kinds of exploitation and forced work, but several respondents stress out it as a horror or tragedy that one person is going through.

When it comes to knowledge about victims and offenders in trafficking, stakeholders have an idea that victims mostly come from the countries in Croatian surrounding, mostly Bosnia and Herzegovina (N= 10), Kosovo (N= 8), Serbia (N= 6), Montenegro (N= 2), or from the region in general (N= 8) and wider Ukraine (N= 8) or Moldova (N= 1). Several respondents think that there are also victims from the Croatia (N= 6) that are either Romani population or come from rural areas. The groups most at risk for becoming a victim are people in poverty (N= 9), people with poor education (N= 9), young people (N= 7). This is probably connected with perceiving trafficking as a way of forced work and people in unemployment status are more vulnerable. Other vulnerable groups are women and person that currently work as sex worker.

On the other side, respondents know very little about offenders, except law enforcement professionals that are familiar with them within their regular work.

### 3.2. Offenders' strategies for sexual exploitation and trafficking

Same as in sexual exploitation, different stakeholders' representatives believe that offenders are using "bait strategy" involving promises of better living (N= 20 or 67%) followed by coercion, blackmail and threats (N= 13; 43%) or kidnapping (N= 7) and confiscating personal documents (N= 3). What is particularly striking is the notion that usually family members, close person, friends actually help offenders in human trafficking and work against the victim that trusts them (N= 19; 63%). Respondents also mention that it is complex criminal web that works internationally (N= 9; 30%). Respondents find offenders motivation for sexual exploitation mostly in economic reasons: gaining more earnings since sex workers would be paid less or none compare to regular sex work (N= 18; 60%) or migrating with victims to areas with higher demand (N= 10; 33%).

When it comes to the role of buyers, 16 respondents (53%) think that buyers know if sex worker is victim of sexual exploitation and trafficking, but usually do not want to react or agree to buy sex services for lower price. They also think that buyers should take responsibility and avoid sex services from victims (N= 28; 93%).

### 3.3. Protection against sexual exploitation and trafficking

Sex workers are mostly familiar (N= 13; 87%) with their rights in case they are victims of sexual exploitation. Their sources of information are dominantly media (N=9) that share this information, but could be fragmented and occasionally. Additionally, they are informed from other people (N = 4) or independently have shown interest to find out these information (N= 3). One respondent named NGO as a source of information. This is the topic that sometimes sex workers share among themselves and 8 sex workers says that they are talking to each other about the topic, while 7 reported not speaking about the issue.

In general, they believe that sexual exploitation could be tackled if sex work is legalised (N= 8) and if law is stricter towards real offender who are behind sexual exploitation (N= 7). Sex workers here are in an oppressed powerlessness position and several respondents think that sex workers need to be protected and have easy access if they want to report sexual exploitation (N= 3). Sometimes it would be even necessary to

educate person and raise her awareness in case he/she normalises and doesn't perceive itself as victim of sexual exploitation.

Stakeholders respondents think that the best solution is to call the police (N= 14; 47%) and to get empowered, to collect important information, not to give up on hope and seize the moment for escape. Modern technology can be helpful in this manner using specific applications for contacting the police.

## 4. Laws and policies

### 1.1.1. 4.1. Knowledge of the legal framework

Sex workers are mostly familiar with existing framework (N= 14; 93%), and some of them had personal experience with police, paying penalties, etc.

When it comes to law and policies, buyers are in many aspects different. More than 53% (N= 16) has knowledge on legal framework in Croatia, and 14 (app 47 %) doesn't have or has only partially.

Stakeholders' representative due to their professional role mostly have knowledge about legal frame, but their opinions about implementation are quite different.

### 4.2. Opinions about existing law

Sex workers are familiar with existing law, and 4 respondents are either neutral, or aware that law is necessary while 11 (73%) strongly disagrees with the content of the existing law. Their criticism is mostly connected with the idea that penalties are too high (and this is general case with penalties, not solely those related to sex work), but also that is selective when it comes to law enforcement, that is not consistent and that it serves only for political points.

When it comes to law enforcement, 14 out of 15 respondents demonstrate their dissatisfaction with this matter. their critics can be grouped in three main reasons:

- a) there is unjust selection who will be punished, referring that so called "elite prostitution" is not subjected to prosecution, while street sex work usually is under police and court pressure.

- b) there is an experience of police and court corruption in a sense that law enforcement depends on a personal connection
- c) basically, there is no clear dynamics of law enforcement and law is followed sporadically, occasionally, even when it brings political points, while sometimes there are periods when is not followed at all.

Buyers are again divided about existing law. While 13 doesn't have an opinion or is not familiar with the law, for 10 (30%) buyers it is not acceptable and for 6 buyers it is acceptable in some extent. Reasons for negative attitudes come from general sense of injustice and inappropriate legal frame in Croatian society. In these cases, discourse is the same as if they are discussing any other law. 5 respondents articulate that law should not punish sex work or that sanctions are too high. For 6 buyers legal frame is necessary, as it is necessary to follow and implement legal rules.

In terms of implementation, 56% of buyers feel that law is basically not implemented (N= 9) or that is implemented depending on social background and connections that person has implying on the injustice system and corruption (N= 8). Others do not have clear opinion or are not familiar with the law. So far, 56% of buyers feel that the law is not effecting sex industry, while 44% that it has effects.

Representatives of different stakeholders are also ambivalent towards law implementation. Law enforcement officers either think that it is satisfying or didn't want to comment, while NGO representatives demonstrated most critics. Some of them were: inconsistency in implementation, to long procedures, general bad regulation and to soft penalties in certain cases. Further, 16 respondents or 53% (mostly those NGO) actually believe that existing legal framework has no effect on sex industry, and 8 respondents are not sure. In last years, although announced, there were no significant changes in legal frame. It seems that legal framework is not sufficient answer for most severe types of trafficking and sexual exploitation, but on the other hand is not even that strict that prevents sex work in general. We could conclude that there is significant discrepancy between the law, reality and its implementation.

### 4.3. Future measures

In great extent, sex workers are in favour of legalisation of sex work (87%, N= 13). 10 of them feel that it would improve their working conditions and increased their protection. Additionally, for 3 of them it would make a difference if police would stop prosecute them. Interestingly, 5 sex workers stressed out a need for fair and loyal competition on the market, balancing prices and protecting domestic sex workers from foreigners. They also suggested additional measures, such as providing social rights and combating corruption.

However, among 4 respondents there is still lack of trust towards state in a sense that it is usually inefficient in protecting citizens, laws are not followed and do not support the idea that states take over piece of income through taxes. Regardless of that, arguments for legalising sex work prevail. These reasons are basically two main: need for increased social order (N= 6, 40%) and increased protection of sex workers (N= 6; 40%).

Buyers share positive opinion about decriminalisation /legalisation and reflect possible changes (Table 6).

Table 6. Buyers' attitude towards decriminalisation /legalisation of sex work.

	BUYERS	
	yes	no
Will criminalisation of buying sex services have effects on buyers?	30%	70%
Will criminalisation of providing sex have effects on buyers?	30%	70%
Will criminalisation of providing sex have effects on sex workers?	28%	72%
Is legalisation of sex work encouraging for buying sex services?	70%	30%
Is legalisation of sex work encouraging for providing sex services?	66%	34%

To conclude, Table 6. demonstrates that buyers' opinion is that criminalisation doesn't bring expected social results, while legalisation would raise engagement both on buyers and providers side to engage in sex work. Same opinion is shared partially by

stakeholders' representatives who believe that criminalisation of buying sex services would not have negative effects on buyers (N= 21 or 70%).

From the stakeholders' perception, there is a need to make changes in existing legal framework and most of them (N= 11 or 37%) agree that role of the law is to improve personal protection of sex workers, protect public interest and prosecute criminal offence. NGO representative give more importance to the aim of protecting sex worker (60%), while policy makers are equally on the promotion of personal safety (40%) and public interest (40%).

Significant challenge in the future will be to tackle more seriously problem of sexual exploitation and trafficking since same number of respondents (13 out of 30) believe that criminals are always one step ahead and it is impossible to prevent their activities as well as that there are chances for the police to be proactive. For this whole issue, respondents mostly perceive that it is a responsibility of society in general (67%), and only few see it as a responsibility of buyers (N= 3) or sex workers (N= 4).

## 5. Main findings /preliminary conclusions.

After analysing different perspective on sex work and related topics in Croatian context, we can conclude following:

- Considering sex work has very strong **economic perspective**. This is visible from many points. From the sex workers' stories, money was found as a key reason for starting it, all three groups put accent on sex work either as a mode of survival or as an economic exchange. The same is again visible in considering sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- Sex work is almost equalised with the term prostitution, but with the difference that it sounds a) less stigmatizing and b) in a way it presumes legalisation or decriminalisation of the prostitution. Sex workers are exposed to public stigma, but in a way their buyers also.
- Public attitude towards sex work in Croatia has dominant two faces: a) first one is inconsistency between attitude and behaviour that some respondents named as hypocrite; and b) there is general tendency not to see or not to deal with sex work. It couldn't be completely said that general attitude is repressive, but rather

there is like a silent agreement to behave as if sex work doesn't exist. Because of that, it seems that street sex work is the biggest issue for law enforcers.

- Sex work and vulnerability that is connected with it has strong gender perspective: it is considered to be female occupation and women have less power and often become victims of sexual exploitation.
- There is big issue of **safety** having in mind that sex workers face numerous risks and have deep concerns. Three sources are key sources of their worries: a) violent clients, b) financial concern at the moment and in the future and c) health. Due to safety issues, many sex workers entered the business via recommendations and familiar social setting, and are being quite conservative in providing sex services in familiar places without experimenting with new approaches. New trends are brought as tourism develops and organised sex work is moving towards hotels and resorts.
- Sex workers come from different background and they vulnerability also differs. There are sex workers that are additionally deprived and have lower protection and increased exposure to various risks.
- In every respondents' groups there was evident negative attitude towards procurers and agents. This is closely related with safety issues and they are perceived as an additional risk.
- Attitude towards legal framework is strongly by the influence of general social atmosphere with **lack of trust in public institutions**. Debate about regulation of sex work are similar to debates in almost any branch of domestic law. Some key critics are: inconsistency among different acts, lack of public resources to improve peoples' lives, general sense of corruption. However, police is still seen as a **last resort** that a person would turn to in severe danger.
- In terms of legalisation/decriminalisation, one could sense **ambivalence in public sphere**. In the broader context, this issue is one of value issues that divides public sphere, usually between left-wing and right-wing scene.
- Existing law doesn't affect seriously level of sex work, but it also doesn't prevent severe sexual exploitation or violence towards sex workers.
- When sex workers discuss legalisation, then their argument is mostly oriented on gaining employment status. In Croatia employment status is more than

earning money, it is important value, connected with health and pension insurance and almost as gaining a status of the full citizenship.

- Topics of sexual exploitation and trafficking are not set enough on the public agenda. Legal framework is too light for this serious crime, and so far it was considered that it doesn't exist in Croatia.
- Understanding of sexual exploitation includes: presence of coercion and violence, exploitation with purpose of economic benefits, placing at risk women and groups that have lower socio-economic status.
- Understanding of trafficking includes: existence of organised crime, international (regional Balkan perspective), economic exchange on the international market and work exploitation. Particularly vulnerable are those groups with higher unemployment, mostly young undereducated people in risk of poverty. Trafficking is often moderated by a familiar or close family member.
- Both sexual exploitation and trafficking are based on dynamics of promises/deception (that serve as a bait) and coercion/violence. It is crucial to have education and preventive programs tackling most deprived people to fight against any sources of manipulation and deception.

Finally, there is evident lack of organisations that are devoted to providing support and understanding sex work, sexual exploitation and trafficking. Their future development should be encouraged.