

LEGALIZATION OF PROSTITUTION: SYNTHESIS OF LESSONS LEARNED, COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, AND DEVELOPMENT OF A POLICY READINESS INDEX

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ABSTRACT

Governing sex work presents profound public policy challenges, integrating legal, ethical, public health, economic, human rights, and gender equality dimensions. The 21st century has seen diverse national experiments with regulatory models—from full criminalization to decriminalization and the "Nordic Model"—yielding varied and often contentious outcomes. This article analyzes the deep "paradigmatic conflict" underpinning these policies, contending that policy debates are frequently "evidence-resistant" and ideology-driven. Through a comparative synthesis of case studies (e.g., successful decriminalization in New Zealand versus challenges in the Netherlands, Germany, and Nordic countries), the study identifies critical success and failure factors, emphasizing collaborative governance and robust institutional frameworks. To inform policy reform, the article develops a conceptual Sex Work Policy Reform Readiness Index (SPRRI). Drawing on the OECD/JRC composite indicator framework, the SPRRI outlines five dimensions: Rule of Law & Governance, Human Rights & Gender Equality, Public Health Infrastructure, Civil Society & Participation, and Policy Maturity & Evidence Base. This diagnostic tool helps policymakers systematically assess their country's structural and procedural preparedness for reform and advocates evidence-informed, context-sensitive, and participatory approaches to sex work governance, ultimately aiming for more effective and equitable policy outcomes.

Keywords: Sex Work Policy, Decriminalization, Public Policy Reform, Comparative Analysis, Readiness Index

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