

**Fondation Scelles**

Connaître, Comprendre, Combattre  
l'Exploitation Sexuelle







### Excerpt from the book:

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**Cautionary note:** The terms 'child prostitution' and 'prostituted children' are used in this text to denote children that are sexually exploited and sexually trafficked. The connotative manner in which these definitions are perceived and analyzed may differ due to linguistic, cultural, and perceptual differences.

## ISRAEL

	<b>POPULATION</b> 8,3 million		<b>GDP PER CAPITA</b> 40,270.3 USD
	<b>POLITICAL SYSTEM</b> Parliamentary Regime		<b>HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX</b> 19 <sup>th</sup> rank among 187 countries
	<b>GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX</b> 20 <sup>th</sup> rank among 147 countries		<b>CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX</b> 32 <sup>nd</sup> rank among 180 countries

Despite a series of government crackdowns in recent years, prostitution in Israel continues to thrive. Tel Aviv remains the hub for organized prostitution. In 2015, there were approximately 300 prostitution establishments in the city (*The Jerusalem Post*, September 20, 2015). In 2017, Tel Aviv was home to 62% of Israel's "discreet apartments" (apartments serving as a meeting place for sex buyers and prostituted persons) and 48% of its massage parlors (*Exodus Cry*, October 4, 2017).

### Israel's Current Prostitution Market

One of the most common guises that organized prostitution uses are "spas" (brothels disguised as massage parlors). Easily found via the internet or a simple phone call, these "spas" offer sex buyers the opportunity to "choose" from a large number of women of different nationalities. Sex buyers pay 200 shekels (ILS) (USD 56) for a massage, but can negotiate other

"benefits" in exchange of an additional tip. The initial payment, in theory, is shared between the manager of the establishment and the prostituted person, with the tip being entirely for the latter. Sex buyers are asked to bring their own condoms, which women dispose of outside the establishment in case of a police inspection. A status quo with the police seems to prevail as long as there is no "misbehavior."

The majority of prostituted persons are migrant women from the former Soviet Union (*Haaretz*, June 7, 2017). Male prostitution is primarily homosexual.

Recent reports from NGOs have revealed that vulnerable LGBTI Palestinian youth are easy prey for sex traffickers, due to their precarious status and restrictions on access to employment (*US Department of State*, June 2018). A deafening silence surrounds the sexual exploitation of children. A hidden phenomenon, omerta, the prostitution of

children is certainly a devastating reality in Israel despite being vastly under-reported. It has already been mentioned in many different places such as strip clubs, spas, the street, at parties, and on the internet. According to a specialized inter-ministerial team, the average age of entry into prostitution in Israel is between 12 and 14 years old (*ECPAT International*, June 26, 2017).

In 2016, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs estimated that there were between 11,420 and 12,730 prostituted persons in Israel, of whom 95% were women and 5% were men. About 11% of female victims were children and 62% were mothers (*The Times of Israel*, May 2, 2016). This study does not necessarily include victims of trafficking, who are more difficult to identify.

In addition, *ELEM-Youth in Distress*, an Israeli NGO whose aim is to provide assistance to young people in distress, reported that out of the 423 young people in prostitution who received assistance in 2017, the majority were girls (100% in the Alma center), however the proportion of boys reached 30% in the city of Haifa. Among these young people, the majority are between 18 and 26 years old, except at the Alma center where 51% were between 14 and 18 years old. There is a majority of persons of Israeli or Arab origin in Haifa, with significant proportions of immigrants in certain city centers (Eilat: 30% Russian women, Alma: 25% Russian women and 27% Ethiopian women) (*ELEM*, 2018).

Despite the illegality and the repression, brothel activity thrives. About ILS 510 million (USD 142 million) would be generated each year in “discreet apartments”, representing 43% of the total annual revenue (ILS 1.2 billion/USD 334 million in 2016) generated by prostitution in Israel. Escort services collected

ILS 220 million (more than USD 61 million) (*The Times of Israel*, May 2, 2016). The vast majority of the money generated by prostitution comes from clandestine and illegal means of practice.

### **Gentrification of Tel Aviv**

The gentrification, decided in the course of the 2010's, of certain neighborhoods of Tel Aviv has had the more or less voluntary consequence of driving away illegal prostitution (*Haaretz*, October 2, 2017). Urbanization projects have increased police presence in these neighborhoods, which were generally overrun by prostitution. A new police station, built near a park where prostitution once flourished but has since been rehabilitated as a children's playground, testifies to the neighborhood's transformation efforts (*Haaretz*, October 2, 2017). It appears that the objectives of eliminating prostitution and various forms of trafficking have been achieved through shutdowns of many prostitution venues and arrests. However, this is not a long-term solution for the city, as illegal activities have already moved to other popular neighborhoods.

### **A Proactive actor in the fight against trafficking**

According to the 2018 US Department of State report on Trafficking in Persons, Israel has been classified in Tier 1 since 2012 because the country is considered an effective actor in the fight against human trafficking (*US Department of State*, June 2018).

This classification is based on various criteria, such as the efforts made in trafficking investigations, convictions and prevention and protection measures for victims. Israel's commitment to combating human trafficking has enabled it to be classified in Tier 1, but this assessment must be qualified in practice. Indeed, if the efforts undertaken by the country are indisputable

(significant legislative arsenal, active fight against traffickers, training of the personnel concerned, victim identification, complete assistance), they must be compared to more disputable aspects (inadequacy between the law and the applied penalties, low number of prosecutions compared to the number of investigations, the keeping of African migrants in vulnerable situations that benefit traffickers).

231 investigations for sex trafficking were initiated in 2017 (279 in 2016) and 10 traffickers were prosecuted (3 in 2016). However, only 3 people were convicted (16 in 2016) (*US Department of State*, June 2018). Sentences rarely exceed 7 years of imprisonment and most traffickers receive suspended prison sentences, fines, or community service (*US Department of State*, June 2017). The dichotomy between the low sentences given and the recommended sentences in the 2006 anti-trafficking law (16 years' imprisonment for the trafficking of adults and 20 years for the trafficking of children) is striking and highlights the low involvement of some of the judicial personnel in the fight against human trafficking. However, specialized training is provided to law enforcement, diplomatic and judicial personnel.

Many efforts are being made to identify and assist victims of trafficking, but for African migrants, those efforts have been limited. Indeed, African migrants are often subjected to arbitrary detention due to violations of the immigration law, even those who are identified as victims. Some illegal migrants do, however, have access to specialized shelters and specific assistance when they have been identified as victims (*US Department of State*, June 2018).

### **Migration and Prostitution**

The country's immigration policy has become more severe since 2013. Due to Israel's hardline immigration policies and its

reluctance to grant the refugee status, many migrants in precarious circumstances turn to prostitution. This assessment is all the more worrying as it is estimated that there are 40,000 refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa in the country, all of whom are affected by these repressive measures (*HRW*, 2018).

In 2013, the Prevention of Infiltration Law, originally created to keep Palestinian nationals with violent intentions out, was amended to allow detainment of African immigrants for one year without trial, followed by deportation (*Ynetnews*, 24 November 2013) The figures are evidence of this harsh attitude: 99.9% of asylum claims by African migrants, mainly from Eritrea and Sudan, were reportedly rejected (*HRW*, 2016). Thus, many women, especially Eritrean women, become trapped in prostitution.

According to data transmitted by the Knesset subcommittee Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution, around 360 Eritrean women were engaged in prostitution at the beginning of 2018, which is 160 more than the previous year (*Haaretz*, March 9, 2018). It is also important to note that gathering data on this population is extremely difficult, given their illegal status. With people from Eritrea accounting for 72% of illegal immigrants in the country, the number of trafficked persons is likely much higher (*US Department of State*, June 2018). The numbers are certainly much higher than the Ministry of Justice's estimation of 3,000 victims.

The closure of the Egypt-Israel border has led to a drastic drop in the number of migrants arriving in the country (from 17,000 in 2011 to none in 2017). As a result, many migrants have been stranded in precarious situations in the Sinai desert. A significant number of them are then abducted by sexual exploitation networks

and brought to Israel. With the Knesset approving plans to close the Holot camp in December 2017, this problem will likely get worse, as the Holot camp was used to detain migrants pending deportation or transfer to third countries. With the closure of the camp, there is no doubt that its occupants will in turn become victims of sex trafficking networks (*US Department of State*, June 2018).

Over 6% of children in Israel are not Israeli nationals. Children of migrants and asylum seekers are very vulnerable to sexual exploitation networks, as are the children of Bedouins, Arabs, and Palestinians (*ECPAT International*, June 26, 2017). Indeed, these populations suffer from marginalization that contributes to situations of precariousness and vulnerability (*HRW*, January 2018).

### Sex Tourism

The development of tourism in Israel has been accompanied by the development of sex tourism, with, for example, soliciting activities seen in hotels and hostels. Sex tourism in Israel takes many forms. On one hand, tourists come to enjoy a “variety of sexual experiences”, while on the other, traffickers bring women into the country on tourist visas in order to feed organized prostitution networks (*Haaretz*, June 7, 2017).

Many hotels rent rooms for prostitution to sex buyers via unofficial websites. In 2016, a couple was sentenced for human trafficking, procuring, and money laundering. For six years they used, among other things, hotel rooms in Jerusalem. Their victims entered the country on tourist visas and were taken from the airport to hotel rooms where they were forced into prostitution (*Haaretz*, September 18, 2017).

This method is widely used by traffickers because there are many countries for which a visa is not required in

order to enter Israel. This is notably the case for former members of the Soviet Union, whose citizens’ account for around 52% of the prostituted people in Israel (*Haaretz*, June 7, 2017).

In June 2018, the head of Border Control gave a presentation on this issue to the Knesset, before the Subcommittee on Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution. He said that since the beginning of the year, 72 women from Ukraine and Georgia had been caught and arrested trying to enter the country for prostitution purposes (*Haaretz*, June 7, 2017). Given the scale of this phenomenon, the resources allocated to the police for this fight are clearly insufficient.

### The Adoption of the Nordic Model

Prostitution has been legal in Israel since 1949 with the Prostitution and Abomination Act. However, all forms of exploitation of prostitution, such as procuring or brothel management, are illegal (*Kehila News Israel*, August 25, 2015). Nevertheless, prostitution activities in brothels and spas are still carried out in a discreet and illegal manner.

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018, the Knesset plenary passed a bill, introduced by Ayelet Shaked, the Minister of Justice, that criminalizes the use of prostitution. This bill will be accompanied by an aid and support program for prostituted persons to exit prostitution.

This bill, introduced as a five-year temporary order, will come into effect in 18 months to give law enforcement ample time to prepare for its implementation and expand rehabilitation services for prostituted persons (*Alliance*, January 1, 2019).

According to the new law, the criminal offense will mainly be considered an administrative offense, punishable by a fine of ILS 2,000 (USD 556). A repeat

offense within three years is punishable by a fine of ILS 4,000 (USD 1,113). However, in relevant cases, the prosecution may indict for a criminal offense, which carries a maximum penalty of ILS 75,300 (USD 20,954). The Minister of Justice may advocate an alternative to the payment of the fine, such as attending a workshop to raise awareness and educate the public on the harm caused to people trapped in the prostitution cycle in order to prevent recidivism.

The government has continued to provide aid to trafficking victims through several initiatives. A compensation fund was set up in an effort to redistribute traffickers' seized funds to victims, and resulted in the allocation of ILS 887,000 (USD 246,825) to victims in 2017. The same year, the Ministry of Justice received 202 requests for legal aid from trafficking victims and issued 129 visas. The government also manages shelters for victims, including reintegration services (employment training, psychosocial support, medical treatment, language training and legal assistance) for a period of one year. These shelters welcomed 98 victims in 2017. A day center offers the same services, and 350 people visited these day centers in 2017 (*US Department of State*, June 2018).

### **Prostituted Persons' Health**

Drug addiction is a common problem among prostituted persons in Israel. It is usually once a person is in prostitution that they develop an addiction. People in prostitution are affected by many medical problems (gynecological problems, poor dental health, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other issues) (*The Conversation*, October 27, 2016).

Of the young prostituted people assisted by the NGO *Elem*, a very high proportion of them have developed issues

with alcohol (89%) or drugs (81%). 97% also have high-risk sexual behaviors and 94% are victims of sexual violence. In addition, a significant percentage (18%) suffers from malnutrition, up to 40% in the Alma center (*ELEM*, 2016).

### **The Internet and Prostitution**

According to Reut Guy, an employee at *Elem*, social media and certain apps have made finding a prostituted person extremely easy and accessible for men in Israel (*Haaretz*, July 3, 2017). In addition, anonymous online message boards allow potential sex buyers to discuss how and where to find particular types of women and services. Today, Tinder is the most-used tool for finding prostituted persons in Israel. The app's predisposition towards "one-time encounter" culture makes it the perfect place to search for and sell sexual services. According to Idit Harel-Shemesh, director of the NGO *Mitos-The Day After Prostitution*, women involved in these Tinder relationships often consider that they have deceived these men into offering paid sex acts, for example, a new pair of jeans or concert tickets. They do not understand that they do not hold the power in these relationships (*Haaretz*, July 3, 2017).

Prostitution on the Internet operates without regulation. The Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution Subcommittee met in 2017 to discuss the issue. During this meeting, they determined that the lack of information regarding the use of apps for soliciting prostitution and perpetuating trafficking is a major issue (*Haaretz*, July 3, 2017).

In conclusion, Israel has undertaken extensive investigative work on the remaining spas and brothels in the country, especially in Tel-Aviv. However, law enforcement still remains dangerously understaffed. For example, only one police officer has the jurisdiction to approve the

status of victim of trafficking, even though the country offers immunity in regard to immigration violations for victims of trafficking (*US Department of State*, June 2018). As a result, only 47 victims were identified in 2017. It is essential for Israel to work on broadening the abilities of its police force, especially to help address the situation of victims brought into prostitution on a tourist visa. In addition, increased punishment is essential for the penalties to become dissuasive.

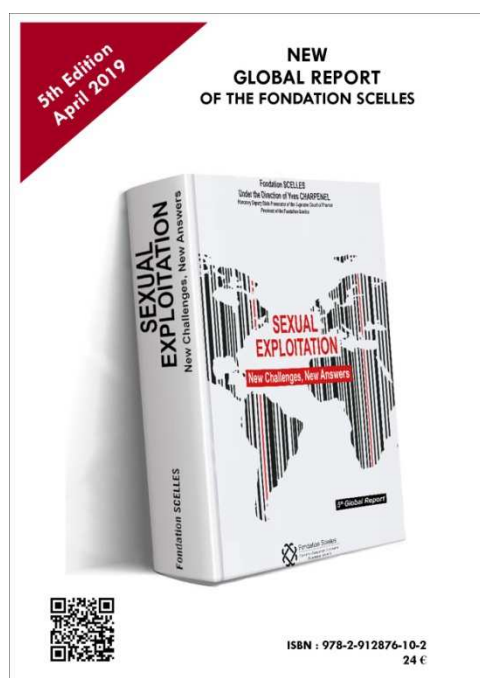
Efforts to combat child marriage should also be strengthened. Awareness raising campaigns could be implemented in religious communities (through rabbis or sheiks), as about 4,000 children are married each year.

Furthermore, although sentences for sex buyers of child prostitution have increased from three to five years of imprisonment, their sentences should be equal to the penalties for sexual violence or rape of a child under the age of 16 (*ECPAT International*, June 26, 2017). The Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution Subcommittee should establish a task force specializing in prostitution and trafficking. Tinder and other social networks are widely used by traffickers who have learned to make the most of them.

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The **Global Report** is produced by the **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation**, in collaboration with internal and external experts (magistrates, lawyers, social workers, NGO leaders...), and the support of local NGO correspondents or international researchers.



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The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles**, recognized as a public utility since 1994 and as a consultative status with ECOSOC, is an independent, non-profit organization based in Paris (France) dedicated to fight the system of prostitution and the exploitation of prostituted persons, through information, analysis, advocacy, trainings, awareness initiatives and legal actions. The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles** is a co-founding member of the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International) which was launched in 2013 and today brings together 28 abolitionist NGOs from 22 countries.

The **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** (Observatoire international de l'exploitation sexuelle) is a worldwide hub which allows for information exchange on the system of prostitution. The hub is regularly consulted by French and foreign experts including NGOs, institutions, journalists, lawyers, researchers and those involved in the defense of human rights. The goals of the **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** are:

- to analyze all the aspects of the phenomenon: prostitution, sex tourism, procurement, child pornography, sex buyers, human trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation...
- to encourage reflection and to take a stand
- to inform the public who are interested in these issues

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