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The anti-prostitution law is about to take effect, and the discussion around its postponement is becoming heated.

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In about a month, the anti-prostitution law will go into effect, and the debate between those who support it and those who are against it is becoming heated. The law will allow the police, for the first time ever, to fine clients of prostitution, which will also harm the sexual workers themselves. Those who are against the law ask for a two years freeze in its enforcement, due to many uncertainties still surrounding the different articles in the government's plan to rehabilitate people in prostitution.

Those who support the law warn that postponing it will make plans and budgets fall between the cracks, both the plans that were agreed upon and launched, and the ones that are still in development. The debate, which is carried amongst and between feminist organizations and additional organizations, has to do with social correction, representation of women sex workers and the different ways of protecting them, and the meaning of terms such as "choice" and "alternatives."

On December 2018, the Knesset unanimously passed the law, which states that the act of paying, or attempting to pay, for sex, will lead to a fine of 2000 NIS (approx. \$580 – ELEM USA), which will be doubled in case of a repeating offense. That added Israel to the list of countries that adopted the Swedish model. Those who supported the law emphasized that it is based on two ideas: Framing of customers - in order to label prostitution as illegitimate, and a massive, precedented investment in promoting rehabilitation of sex workers.

The explanation for the law cites that "we must act to shrink the prostitution market by using the combined tools of rehabilitation, information, education, and enforcement." The decision to push the date when the law goes into effect by 18 months, was meant to allow the government for preparation and adjustment of the frameworks responsible for supporting and accompanying people in prostitution, as the promotion of "Informational, educational, and public knowledge steps that are required," and the training of cops who'll enforce the offense.

According to a national poll carried in 2016 by the Welfare and the Public Security Ministries, there are 12,000 people in the prostitution industry. On top of that, many organizations note that there are thousands of minors who deal with prostitution as well. Relevant sources have criticized in the past the research on which the poll was based, saying it only takes into consideration some of the people who take part in prostitution. “The research has mostly found those who were “convenient” to find,” said one such source.

In January 2019, the government approved a 90 Million NIS budget (approx. \$260,800,000 – ELEM USA) for three years, for rehabilitation programs that will be mostly ran by the Ministry of Welfare, in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Education, and Public Safety. Three rounds of elections have caused many delays in the budgeting of the programs and the publishing the bids necessary for their operations. Even so, there’s a rare, overall agreement among the Ministries, organizations who oppose the law, and even some who support it, that not all the guarantees for support of people in prostitution will be viable by July 10th, the date on which enforcement is meant to start. That countdown was never put on hold.

Reut Guy, Head of the Extreme Risk and Girls Field at ELEM, is certain that the enforcement date should be postponed. “No one is ready for it, not the police, and not the supporting organizations,” she says. “Before we even think about implementing the law, we have to make sure the infrastructure is ready, and it is not. I hear people say that the women who are currently involved in prostitution should pay the price as we journey towards some better society. I doubt this law will eliminate prostitution, but it’s mostly immoral. We can’t sacrifice the most vulnerable demographic just so we can pat ourselves on the shoulder for being so enlightened. We have to put our egos aside, and stop this.”