

The Women's Equality Coalition appreciates the opportunity to submit a written brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on its study on Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People in Canada.

The Women's Equality Coalition is made up of organizations from across Canada that provide front-line crisis and anti-violence services and support, representation and advocacy for women and girls who are or have been prostituted, who are targeted for or are at risk of being prostituted, and who have been subject to male violence, including prostitution. The Coalition is comprised of Indigenous, Francophone and Anglophone women's groups, as well as women survivors that recognize that prostitution is both a cause and a consequence of women's inequality. Several of our member organizations are grateful to have appeared before the Committee as witnesses on this study.

Addressing the demand

The practice of buying sexual acts has a disproportionate impact on women and girls and perpetuates their historical disadvantage. We know that in Canada:

- There are more cases of sex trafficking than forced labour;
- [96% of victims of human trafficking](#) are women and girls, disproportionately Indigenous and racialized women; and
- Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is mostly domestic (i.e. women and girls are transported from one city to another for the purposes of sexual exploitation).

There is a misperception that sex trafficking and prostitution should be treated as two separate and unrelated issues. However, the two are intrinsically linked as the demand for prostitution fuels sex trafficking. It is in these terms that international organizations including the OSCE and the UN General Assembly, as well as the European Parliament, are calling for member states to address the demand for paid sex as the central tool to fight human trafficking.

A [2021 Occasional Paper](#) released by the OSCE highlights the importance of addressing the demand that fosters sexual exploitation, in particular the exploitation of the prostitution of others stating: *"While the demand is a core driver in all forms of Traffic in Human Beings, nowhere is it more pronounced and direct than in the case of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, given the lack of separation between the exploited victim and the end "user".*

Criminalizing the male demand for prostitution is a legislative model that has been adopted in other free and democratic societies, particularly those with a strong commitment to sex equality and to combatting the global and local trafficking of women and girls. The Equality Model (also known as the Nordic model) prioritizes the rights of those who have been exploited while holding buyers and exploiters accountable for the harms they cause, providing protection, support and exit options for all prostituted person. Mostly, the Equality Model is proposing a change in the paradigm on how we view prostitution and works to change mentalities that legitimize this gendered practice.



The Women's Equality Coalition believes that poor understanding and implementation of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA, 2014)* is the main cause of inefficiencies in Canada's efforts to end human trafficking. The Women's Equality Coalition is encouraging the government to fully implement the Equality Model to protect and support women and girls in prostitution and those who are victims of human trafficking.

Our Recommendations

1. Maintain and reinforce the implementation of PCEPA across the country to discourage demand in all jurisdictions.
2. Develop a National Plan of Action to jointly address the systems of prostitution and sex trafficking, which explicitly recognizes that prostitution victimizes the vulnerable. Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada should be responsible for the implementation of this plan, in conjunction with Public Safety. A primary area of focus should be prevention strategies, public campaigns to address the myths surrounding these realities and providing adequate funding support for the victims.
3. Support victims of prostitution and sex trafficking by implementing an exit support program, similar to the model in France, that ensures women have access to housing, employment supports and, in some instances, temporary residency.
4. Repeal the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* that place victims of sex trafficking at risk of deportation, while also expanding the use of existing immigration mechanisms that are available to support women and girls, including the temporary resident permit for human trafficking victims and the open work permit for vulnerable workers.
5. Reinforce the fight to end poverty by adopting a guaranteed livable income for all Canadians. Factors such as systemic poverty and the lack of affordable housing often push women into prostitution.
6. As the Equality Model seeks to shift the burden of criminality to the exploiter, the Government of Canada should repeal Section 213 of the Criminal Code.
7. Delete or expunge all records of convictions under Criminal Code articles 210.1 and 213(1)(c), which have since been repealed.

Members of the Women's Equality Coalition:

Aboriginal Women Action Network (AWAN)
Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle (CLES)
Exploited Voices now Educating (EVE)
London Abused Women Centre (LAWC)
Strength in Sisterhood (SIS)
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter (VRRWS)

